

mindfields

THE JOURNAL ABOUT IDEAS AND ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

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VOL. 1, ISSUE 3, 3RD QTR 2007 / RS 50

INTREPID TRAVELLERS

JEAN AUDREY THOMAS:
Trans-Himalayan Nomad

AN EPIC REVIVAL:
Anant Pai and Amar Chitra Katha

WHO DARES CHANGE A CURRICULUM?

PHYSIQUE OF A CHILD

DIVASWAPNA:
Gijubhai Badheka's Daydream

HOW TO VISIT DELHI BY METRO

JOURNEY TOWARDS A GOOD HEART:
Maitreya Project Universal Education School

PLUS

NESTING TALES:
Bird Life in Your Backyard

POETRY'S LUBS AND DUBS

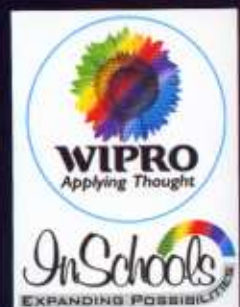


NOT JUST ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL !

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DIVSWAPNA : THE DAYDREAM

Vishnu Kant looks at the enduring relevance of Gijubhai Badheka's masterpiece on transforming a classroom

Page 06



PHYSIQUE OF A CHILD

Ashish Rajpal addresses the attitudes and oversights that are affecting our children

Page 22



DELHI BY METRO

Travelling by the metro gives 'dillidarshan' a whole new meaning. Shagufta Bhardwaj tells you how to get started

Page 38



NOT JUST TELLING STORIES

Anant Pai's Amar Chitra Katha transformed the way modern India feels about its epics and traditional stories

Page 10



CITY TO VILLAGE

The inspiring story of the Maitreya Project Universal Education School at Bodh Gaya

Page 16



OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Jean Audrey Thomas has walked the Trans-Himalayan ranges. An enduring love affair with the outdoors

Page 48



NESTING TALES

Shrikant Ingalthallikar's primer to how to look out for the neighbours you never noticed - the bird kind

Page 30

LETTERS Page 05

POETRY: LUBS AND DUBS Page 34
An insightful new way to look at poetry

FIRST PERSON Page 26
A family's homeschooling experience

GET ACQUAINTED Page 44
Learning to look at Buddhist Sculpture

TEACHERS WHO TEACH, NOT TELL Page 53
Indomitable Spirit of SK Saxena

MOVIE REVIEW Page 55
Whale Rider: A tale of a young girl finding her place in a traditional society

FREEZE FRAME Page 57
Kari as Brand New Teacher

GLOSSARY Page 59

NEWSBYTES Page 58

END NOTE Page 60
Who Dares Change a Curriculum?

CONTRIBUTORS

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EDITORS' NOTE



This has been an Intrepid Traveller issue in more ways than one.

Featured in this edition of Mindfields are mavericks like Gijubhai Badheka - nonconformist educator who emphasised child-centric, experiential education as early as the 1920s. Educator of the month, Ananth Pai, took it upon himself to make forgotten Indian heroes as cool as the inhabitants of Gotham City and Krypton. Oxford scholar Kabir, is now principal of a school in rural Bihar. Jean Thomas and SK Saxena have defied notions of 'generation gap' and 'age' - at 70+, they are more feisty and inquisitive than a lot of young people you'd come across. The Ananthnarayanans' homeschooling experiment has been a quiet, personal one - without ado or fanfare.

As months go by, we are introduced to more and more remarkable people - some public figures, others unknown - who have traded cushiness for uncertainty; chosen untrodden paths instead of bourgeois roads to success and "making it", whose vision extends beyond existential concerns about themselves and immediate family.

These are journeys of incredible hope and transformation. Here's to more of them.

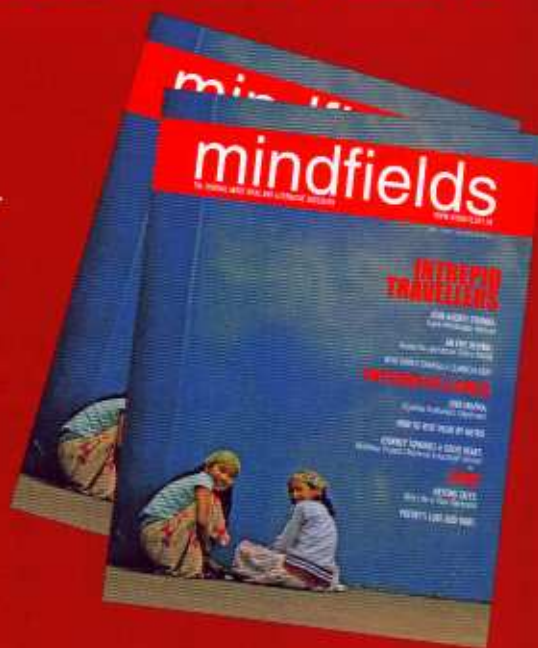
Amruta Patil,
Luke Haokip

New Delhi
September 2007

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MAILBOX

SEXUAL ABUSE IN SCHOOLS

Reading the article on child sexual abuse in your 2nd issue made me think of how susceptible children are to this on school campus as well.

I would like to see the issue of safety and security inside the campus being dealt with in some future issue of Mindfields.

With best wishes,
Suhas S
by email

CLARITY IN TARGET AUDIENCE?

Intriguing niche that you have chosen to service with Mindfields. I was wondering about who the target audience is - is it a parenting magazine or is it for teachers? The focus of articles might need to shift accordingly.

A.G. Tamba
by email

Mindfields' target audience is people who are involved and interested in the realm of learning and education - especially that of young children.

This naturally includes parents, and primary and middle school teachers; but it also includes school management, people interested in a career in education, and other concerned citizens. As the issues go by, we are confident that Mindfields' stories will attain the breadth and depth our various readers are looking for.

Ed.

CLARITY IN TARGET AUDIENCE?

Read the two issues from cover to cover - most articles are worth recommending to parents, teachers and laypeople alike.

We have taken three subscriptions for our school. One copy will be in the foyer, for parents and visitors to browse through!

An issue that is preoccupying my teacher's mind is the D word - Discipline. How to approach it in the wake of all this "don't touch", physical abuse controversy. Maybe you could start a forum?

Pritam Benjamin
Principal
Inventure Academy,
Bangalore

ALL THIS OUTBOUND STUFF

From issue 1 to issue 2, there has been much improvement in Mindfields. Visually it is surely getting stronger. One thing - the emphasis on travel (in an education magazine) is a little confusing.

Raghu Achrekar
Pune

Most progressive educators agree that what happens outside of the classroom is as crucial to a child's education as what happens inside.

In keeping with this, Mindfields would like to foster a love for the outdoors. In sections such as 'Get Acquainted' and 'Interactions', we bring stories that encourage a loving, symbi-

otic relationship between our audience and the natural world. In our 'How to Visit' section, we offer experiences and journeys that may be shared by child and adult. Beats hanging around a mall in a strange city, and beats reading about history in books.

Ed.

E-NABLING SCHOOLS

I recently ran into Dinesh, a computer scientist who wants to "e-nable" schools, both elitist and low-cost, as also urban and rural. Dinesh is of the ilk who has done his bit of experimentation with money-spinning software creation and given all of it up to support worthy causes around his own country.

He wishes to create free, open source software that will simplify content storage/handling mechanisms for the administration and staff of schools; and make the code user-friendly, so that it will not require a software geek to maintain the software later on. Makes life easier for schools that are not so heavily funded.

I thought it might be a great Mindfields story.

Deepa Aswani
Bangalore

DO YOU HAVE CRITIQUE TO OFFER US? OR A STORY IDEA OR EXPERIENCE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE? WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU. MAIL US AT: EDITOR@MINDFIELDS.IN THE BEST LETTERS WILL BE PUBLISHED IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF MINDFIELDS.

Divaswapna: the daydream



Gijubhai Badheka's 'Divaswapna' chronicles a rural primary school teacher's innovation in class through self-learning. First published in Gujarati, March 1931; the book generated a lot of interest. Then it all but disappeared from public consciousness for almost fifty four years before being resurrected by translation and reprint in 1985. Educator and teacher trainer Vishnu Kant examines the continuing relevance of Badheka's classic in Indian schools.

TEXT: VISHNU KANT

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: STUDIO UMBILICAL

I was introduced to Gijubhai Badheka's *Divaswapna* by Rohit Dhankar of Digantar, Jaipur. We were training teachers at a experimental school in rural Rajasthan. *Divaswapna* was the basic reading for newly recruited teachers of the institution.

Master Laxmiram, protagonist of the book, became a role model for context-imbedded pedagogy. So powerful did the reading experience prove to be - young teachers converted themselves into missionaries, fired by determination to bring joy and meaning in their classrooms. *Marushalas*, as these schools were called, came to be known as field-based educational experiment centers in the Thar desert.

It's been seventeen years since that teaching training session. Many of the young teachers of the group have remained there - stalwarts in the heat and struggle of a desert village, trooping along, making innovations in their classrooms, and sharing their learning with others. Unbelievable for those of us hardened by tales of teacher attrition and impassive classes.

The author of *Divaswapna*, Gijubhai Badheka (1885-1939), was a trained lawyer practicing in South Africa, who decided to come back to the country and devote his life to fighting the inertia, meaninglessness and resultant boredom of school classroom. Master Laxmiram's struggles and experiments in education - way ahead of his time - represent Gijubhai's own.

Deeply influenced by the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi and Italian educator Maria Montessori (1870-1952), like Badheka himself was, Master Laxmiram is anguished by the state of classrooms. He takes on the system - unimaginative teaching strategies, use of rote, culture of fearful, uninvolved students.

WHY DIVASWAPNA'S MASTER LAXMIRAM IS RELEVANT TO US NOW

Because we need an example to show us that at the heart of the educational change lies the transformation of institutions and practices that exist, rather than creating new and parallel systems of schooling.

Because we need a role model who sees learning and teaching as connected processes, who believes that unless we change, we cannot teach differently.

Because we need a role model that convinces us that it is possible to change the institutions and practices that have been in existence for long.

Because we need a role model that actually "made it happen" - not with extravagant resources and manpower, but with individual grit and determination.

Because we don't need any new tangled philosophy of knowledge or pedagogy, we need to see a *prayog-purush* - someone who can show us how theory may be brought to life. ■

The local Education Officer grants him permission to experiment only on the guarantee that he would not disrupt the discipline of the school, and that his students would perform well in the exam. No mean feat.

Master Laxmiram faces the ridicule of fellow teachers from the very outset. He perseveres quite cheerfully - grateful for the opportunity he has been given. And there, in the Grade 4 class of a government primary school, begins his momentous journey as a teacher and reformer.

His means of winning over students' hearts are simple enough - listening to them, telling them stories, taking them out for a walk, playing with them - and, over and above everything else, being *interested* in them.

Laxmiram's classes revolve around student centric activities - playing cards, different kinds of games, singing, outings. Drama is a tool he uses extensively - the stories or situations are based on the people they see and encounter in their daily lives - tailors, cobblers, farmers. This not only gives recognition to the socio-economic status of the children but also implicitly sends a message that *their* world is valued. And that knowledge outside school is knowledge worth acquiring.

Laxmiram's use of map, drawings of buildings and surveying the locality to teach geography again bring the power of context into the fore. The learning of the child is connected to their world - and thus it becomes *real* and *authentic*.

A variety of other pedagogic practices are used in his experiments. He uses student involvement and simple strategies to build a library in his class, to start a 'museum' of local objects, and so on. Laxmiram stubbornly refuses to follow the rule of thumb - "more cramming, no understanding".

In the spirit of true enquiry, he refuses to spoonfeed his pupils with answers to questions. Which comes as nothing less than a shock for everyone concerned (including fellow teachers). "What does the word 'adjective' mean, sir?", asks a student. "Find out for yourself" he tells him. But he doesn't leave the students unattended either - he scaffolds the process by giving examples, and lending direction to their questions. Like a true constructivist, he shuns memorization of definitions, and helps them to understand. He asserts to his headmaster, "Definitions are implied."

The purposeful strategist in Laxmiram comes through when you see him *not* antagonizing the system where his uncompromising stand may jeopardize his "experiment". Right in the beginning we see him asking the Education Officer to let his pupils come to school without their caps as he sees them dirty, and unnecessary. This is not acceptable to the Education Officer. Laxmiram doesn't give up and settles for the students not wearing them to *his* class. His purpose is met. At another point of time, he concedes to teach children grammar for the sake of exams (he considers any kind of learning without intrinsic meaning abhorable) - but in an interesting way. This establishes his credibility in the minds of the Education Officer, and his colleagues.

Master Laxmiram makes a convincing case of a different kind of testing - saying that evaluation should be done by the teacher who has taught the students. Pupils ought to be tested while actually engaged in doing/applying what they have learnt. Another fundamental principle Laxmiram promotes is that evaluation should include *everything* that has been learnt - he insists that the Education Officer see how the boys have learnt to clean their rooms and the campus!

Competition and comparisons are avoided at any cost in Laxmiram's classroom. Hence he innovates *antakadi* to be done in a circle where everybody is equal, and gets a chance to demonstrate their learning. "A match between teams ends with victory and defeat. That gives rise to competition and jealousy. In my arrangement if one boy does not know, the next boy takes over and the game goes on. A boy may be unable to say his piece once, but he has another chance and may be able to do so in the next round."

Gandhiji's influence is visible on Gijubhai's educational philosophy. Learning to keep the places we live and work in is important, as is personal hygiene. When the Education Officer expresses lack of 'propriety' of insisting on personal cleanliness, the unyielding Laxmiram declares, "Squalor is the biggest problem of this country".

These simple ideas in practice look real and engaging. Within six months, Laxmiram's classroom is a transformed place. The syllabus and textbooks remain unchanged, but what happens with them has altered. Under their teacher's nurture, an uncontrollable class that would quarrel and fight at the slightest oppor-



"A MATCH BETWEEN TEAMS ENDS WITH VICTORY AND DEFEAT. THAT GIVES RISE TO COMPETITION AND JEALOUSY. IN MY ARRANGEMENT IF ONE BOY DOES NOT KNOW, THE NEXT BOY TAKES OVER AND THE GAME GOES ON."

Gijubhai Badheka
on why competition must be
avoided at all costs



GIJUBHAI BADHEKA : RENAISSANCE MAN OF INDIAN EDUCATION

- Born on 9th November, 1885, Bhavnagar, Gujarat
- Lawyer by profession, practicing in South Africa
- Was transformed by Maria Montessori's ideas on education, and played a key role in introducing them in India in the 1920s.
- Collaborated with pioneering educator Tarabai Modak to develop a preschool system. In 1936 they founded Nutan Bai Shikshan Sangh - an association for teachers, parents and others interested in children's education.
- Founded a teacher training institute and trained over 500 teachers.
- Wrote 174 books including stories for children. Edited two journals on education - Trimark and Shikshan Patrika - in Gujarati and Marathi.
- Was a champion of experiential education, and shifting the emphasis from educator to learner in a classroom.
- Passed away in 1939.

COMPILED BY NILI MEHTA

tunity, develops into a collaborative team that performs complex tasks - from teaching other children in school, to planning and managing a school function. Rather than being fearful of coming to school every morning, children start looking forward to it.

Laxmiram's 'experiment' has its share of detractors throughout. His ideas are cynically dismissed as 'fads', his enthusiasm is seen as impractical and foolish. Throughout the book, doubt, criticism and contrasting successes are revealed through the conversation between him and others. "Forget your fads about receptive moods...the game of silence may be good in Montessori schools. Here in primary schools a sharp slap would make all the students quiet. I would advice you to teach the pupils as the other teachers do..." advises the headmaster.

There is rarely an attempt by the protagonist to justify or convince them. He simply allows his actions speak for his convictions.

In the Education Officer, Master Laxmiram has a supporter who has placed his confidence in him - yet, will not blindly accept everything Laxmiram asks for. There are moments when the Education Officer has doubts about the stakes he has put on Laxmiram's maverick plans. And his faith is rejuvenated each time Laxmiram's experiments yield result.

"When are you going to begin your experiment?" he asks Laxmiram. "The experiment," replies the irrepressible teacher, "is already on!"

The end of the book is the realization of an educator's daydream. And it isn't just the students who are transformed by the experience. Laxmiram becomes a teacher well-loved by his students; accepted and respected by his colleagues and authorities.

With intuitiveness and sensitivity, Master Laxmiram unravels essential components of progressive classroom practices:

- A relationship of love, warmth and respect between students and teacher
- Freedom from corporal punishment
- Freedom to converse, participate, make decisions, and play
- Differential learning in the class - children learning alone, or in groups of similar academic ability
- Learning language through activities, stories, conversation, plays
- Use of locally available materials to create interesting teaching-learning material
- Evaluation by the teacher to promote student learning, not to pass or fail the students

The most valuable lesson for me from the book has been its proactive spirit of bringing about change, and being reflective in the face of un-successes. Time and again we see Master Laxmiram slipping up, facing the ridicule of others, and yet, he refuses to give up. In fact, he uses these failings unflinchingly for fresh and further learning. The quintessential fighter reflects, "It was good in a way that I slipped up at the very first step. Tomorrow I will try a new approach."

If this writing inspires you, great.

If it doesn't, tomorrow I shall try a newer way! ■

VISHNU KANT WAS A TEACHER FOR 12 YEARS BEFORE HE BEGAN FACILITATING TEACHER TRAINING SESSIONS AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS ACROSS THE COUNTRY. HE IS BASED IN BANGALORE BUT LIVES OUT OF A BAG, AND HELPS PEOPLE MAKE THE JOURNEY FROM "I CAN'T" TO "I CAN". VISHNU ESTABLISHED A CBSE SCHOOL AND RAN IT FOR 8 YEARS. HE BELIEVES THAT THE BEST WAY TO LEARN IS TO START TEACHING OTHERS... THEN YOU HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO LEARN.

There has been a resurgence in pictorial storytelling of late, but Amar Chitra Katha (which brought out its first title in 1967) was ahead of its time - in concept, as well as in content. The man behind the mammoth effort, though, and his contribution as a proponent of Indian culture has been deeply undermined. Here is a man as sharp as he is erudite - who can extensively quote Sanskrit verses from the Gita and from the Vedas, and recall incidents from half a century ago down to the slightest detail. Mindfields salutes Anant Pai, better known as Uncle Pai to generations of young Indian readers, as educator of the month.

NOT JUST TELLING STORIES

INTERVIEW AND ILLUSTRATION: AMRUTA PATIL ESSAY: LALITHA VISVESWARAN
PHOTOS: GAYATHRI CHANDRASHEKHAR

WHEN WERE YOU INTRODUCED TO THE WORLD OF COMICS?

Late. When I came to Mumbai at the age of 13, I could not get into any good school because I couldn't speak English. My ambition in Grade 8 was to get a pair of chappals! So comics were a far cry.

Much later, I was introduced to Phantom and Superman. I liked 'Phantom' because of its interpretation of the classic Good versus Evil theme. In fact, a little known fact is that before Amar Chitra Katha, I was involved in printing Phantom comics for The Times of India Group (Pai joined TOI in 1951 as a Junior Executive) at their printing press. We'd bring out comic books that were a compilation of Phantom stories along with a few other 'local' comic strips such as 'Guru's Club'.

YOU ARE FROM A MIDDLE-CLASS BRAHMIN FAMILY FROM KARKALA, NEAR MANGALORE; AND WERE RAISED BY YOUR MATERNAL GRANDFATHER IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE ELDERS RECOUNTED TALES FROM THE EPICS. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE THAT RETELLING MYTHOLOGICAL TALES TO TODAY'S KIDS WAS THE ORDER OF THE DAY?

In 1967, there was a quiz show on Doordarshan - I was working with Times of India then - the participants seemed to know so much, they were familiar with all sorts of facts and figures, with Greek mythology. But when they were asked who the mother of Lord Rama was, they didn't have a clue. (Shortly after this, Pai left his TOI job and started Amar Chitra Katha)

Children are so obsessed with the west...and so alienated from their own culture. It became even more apparent when I got involved in putting together a



WHERE CHILDREN WERE OBSESSED ONLY WITH WESTERN SUPERHEROES LIKE BATMAN AND PHANTOM - ANANT PAI GAVE THEM KRISHNA AND SHIVAJI AND GURU NANAK TO LOOK UP TO. WITH AMAR CHITRA KATHA, INDIAN MYTHOLOGY AND HISTORY REJOINED THE PANTHEON OF 'COOL'.



children's magazine. When a child living in Chennai or Mumbai writes poems about daffodils and stories about a boy named Robert Warrington, you may have a problem there.

SO YOU DECIDED TO TELL THEM THEIR OWN STORIES...WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO PUBLISH THE AMAR CHITRA KATHA COMICS IN ENGLISH RATHER THAN IN REGIONAL LANGUAGES?

It was just a place to begin – because the English speaking market was already acquainted with comic book culture. As soon as we could, we translated Amar Chitra Katha titles into regional languages.

HOW HARD WAS IT TO CONVINCE INDIA BOOK HOUSE (IBH) ABOUT SUPPORTING THE AMAR CHITRA KATHA PROPOSAL?

I went to several publishers before knocking on IBH's door. No one felt confident of the comic book medium – and it was expensive. They didn't see how we could make a success of the plan. IBH was apprehensive too, but they took me on, (*GL Mirchandani of IBH held rights for the first 10 comics Pai developed*). The sales were slack for the first titles – 20,000, when I was aiming at a million.

I used to stand at petrol pumps with a suitcase full of Amar Chitra Katha comics and show them to the people who drove in. If the pump owner couldn't put up a counter for me, I'd pull out nails and hammer and get to work myself...

AND IT WORKED! 'KRISHNA', AMAR CHITRA KATHA'S FIRST TITLE, IS STILL ITS LARGEST SELLING - 11 LAKH COPIES SOLD, AND TRANSLATIONS IN 38 LANGUAGES INCLUDING SERBO-CROAT AND SWAHILI!

It must be my favourite title to date. 'Bhagavad Gita' comes a close second.

HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT RESEARCHING THE TALES? HOW DID YOU SELECT WRITERS AND ILLUSTRATORS? HOW MUCH WERE YOU PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN THE SCRIPTING?

A comic that can be easily read in thirty minutes will often have thirty months of research, referencing, scripting and illustration that goes into it. We have

been careful about details – costume, architecture, regional flavour...

While researching, we went back to the source. To the *puranas*, the *Ramcharitmanas*, to the original texts in Sanskrit. Vettam Mani's 'Puranic Encyclopaedia' was invaluable. I did a lot of the research myself, with formidable support from the likes of VR Bhagwat, Kamala Chandrakant...

For visual references, we turned to the frescoes and sculptures of Ajanta-Ellora, the work on Kalamkari cloth – all sorts of traditional Indian art forms. Since the genre was new in India, it took a lot to get illustrators and writers who could create simple, lucid work. Just being a good illustrator is not enough to make you a good comic book artist. We have been lucky to have some talented illustrators like Ram Waerker, Pratap Mulick, Yusuf Bangalorwala, Souren Roy and Dilip Kadam work with us.

THERE ARE OVER 400 AMAR CHITRA KATHA TITLES. HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT SELECTING STORIES TO TURN INTO COMIC BOOKS?

We started off with the major stories of the Hindu tradition – Krishna, Rama, the Mahabharata. By now we have run through most of the major stories from there – there is hardly anything left. We went on to capture the immortal folklore, mythical heroes, and then historical figures – Heer Ranjha, Chokha Mela, Meera Bai, Guru Nanak, Shivaji, Mangal Pandey. We've done many titles on Muslim figures such as Babar, Humayun, Chand Bi. There were stories of Jesus Christ, the Sikh gurus, historical figures like Mangal Pandey and Lachit Barphukan. We recently did a title on Kalpana Chawla...

HAVE AMAR CHITRA KATHA TITLES EVER RUN INTO TROUBLE WITH RELIGIOUS GROUPS BECAUSE OF THEIR 'TAKE' ON STORIES?

(Laughs) Considering the number of titles and stories we have worked with, we could well have been sued out of business, but the press and public have been very good to us. One instance of unhappiness was over the 'Valmiki' comic – we faced backlash from the Valmiki Samaj over references to Valmiki's early days



as a bandit. But overall, it has been peaceful. No calls from the Shiv Sena. I also have a personal philosophy (*quotes the Sanskrit verse, and then translates*) – “Tell the pleasant truth. Do not tell the unpleasant truth.”

THERE HAS BEEN SOME CRITICISM ABOUT THE ‘BOOKISH’ LANGUAGE USED IN AMAR CHITRA KATHA, AND THE OVER-SEXUALIZED REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN. COMMENT?

The use of language is a very conscious decision. You will not find slang or colloquial language in any of our titles, even *Tinkle* (the other children’s magazine *Pai* started in the 1980s).

As I have mentioned before, our illustrations were based on ancient Indian statues and artwork – that was the way women dressed in the era. The complaints came in about the older artwork – it was done nearly forty years ago – the imagery was toned down after the first 25 titles.

YOU WERE AN EARLY CHAMPION OF ‘EDUTAINMENT’ IN THE COUNTRY...EVEN OLD STODGES LIKE NCERT HAVE GIVEN YOU THE NOD OF APPROVAL...

Children understand and retain much better when shown information pictorial. We proved this once, by having groups of students across Indian metros read *Amar Chitra Katha* titles and then answer a History test. They passed with flying colours (see *box on right*). Parents and schools seem to have acknowledged this – *Amar Chitra Katha* titles are popular purchases for libraries as well as for reading at home.

YOU HAVE BECOME SOMETHING OF A NATIONAL RESOURCE PERSON FOR THE EPICS...

Yes. That seems to have happened. Mikhail Gorbachev’s secretary once called to ask where in the scriptures it was said that “anger kills wisdom”! People call for all kinds of things – Speech writers, ad agency copywriters who want to find an apt *shloka* or want to verify its meaning...



AMAR CHITRA KATHA IN SCHOOLS

Some years back, 30 schools in Delhi participated in an experiment in teaching history to Grades 7 & 8. 961 students participated*. The teacher introduced a topic and distributed copies of the relevant *Amar Chitra Katha* title (*Bagha Jatin*, *Sultana Razia*, *Buddha*, *Ashoka* etc). Students were given 40 minutes to read the title, after which they were given a 15 min test of objective questions. Teachers assessed performances – to find a quantum leap in retention and recall of facts. Hardly surprising, that ‘reading comics’ beats ‘listening to a 40 minute lecture about a dead historical figure’!

As many a resourceful history teacher is discovering – good *chitrakatha* (pictorial tale) is not a careless, facile picturebook. It is a blend of commentary, dialogue and illustration. It makes a tale come alive, and history ceases to be a meaningless litany of names and dates. Instead, distant names like Rana Pratap and Rani Chenamma become *individuals* – and children play ‘witness’ to the incidents that unfold in their lives. ■

**Information from the Amar Chitra Katha archives*

WHAT DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE NEW CROP OF COMICS AND ANIMATED FILMS? DO YOU THINK AMAR CHITRA KATHA HAS WHAT IT TAKES TO HOLD THE ATTENTION OF A YOUNG, DISTRACTED NEW AUDIENCE?

Comic book characters born in the 60’s took a blow because of the immense popularity of TV in the 80s. We lost out a great deal to the new media – and that is partly our mistake. *Amar Chitra Katha* has been lying low for some years now, we haven’t brought out too many new titles – but all that is set to change in the months to come... ■



MYTHICAL SOULFOOD

A GENERATION OF GROWN UP INDIANS THAT KNOWS ITS EPICS AND SPEAKS IN PROPERLY-CONSTRUCTED ENGLISH SENTENCES HAS AMAR CHITRA KATHA COMICS TO THANK FOR IT. LALITHA VISVESWARAN REMEMBERS.

I come from a generation of children that grew up with Russian Puzzle Books, Enid Blyton's Famous Five, Grimm's Fairy Tales and R.K.Narayan's Gods and Demons. At some point, I grew up to be an adult - happens to the best of us. The illustrations disappeared from my storybook pages, what remained was stark alphabets showing me a world in black and white. A bleak new world that filled me with angst and idealism instead of technicolor fantasies and imagination.

And still, among the grown up book spines, one beloved tattered bunch remained - my collection of Amar Chitra Kathas. Some hardbound, others with paper covers - all well-thumbed and dog-eared. A few had been casualties of some past flood, their pages stuck together and illegible - yet I did not have the heart to discard them. They stayed, smelling slightly of dampness and childhood.

My grandfather brought me up on a diet of Indian mythology even before I could read. Amar Chitra Katha comics reinforced the stories, gave face and shape to the personalities. They showed me the face of Prahlad and Sati - not quite household names any more. To this day, when I go out for a walk in the woods, I half expect to see the beautiful Shakuntala there, surrounded by her beloved animals.

Amar Chitra Katha's biggest accomplishment has been the scale of its effort - hundreds of fast-disappearing stories, verbally handed down from generation to generation, have been captured on paper. Some argue that the comics are chauvinistic and badly-produced, that their content is not exactly age-appropriate.

In my view, everything from Greek mythology to Shakespeare has strains of thought that would be "politically incorrect" in our times. It's a question of keeping things within the context of the era they came from. The charge of being age-inappropriate always

makes me chuckle. For most 7 year olds, sexuality doesn't mean much except that it is a darn difficult word to spell. I don't recall being traumatized or excited by any form of sexuality in ACK. Maybe, I saw certain details - such as Draupadi's marriage to five men - with a new kind of understanding while rereading the story during my teens.

The illustrations are benign compared to the soft-porn that masquerades as aesthetic representations of the female form in popular media. Do parents shield their children's eyes from billboards and television screens? In fact the wholesome Amar Chitra Katha women deserve special mention. They were full-figured, doe eyed, feisty. The details in illustration were rivetting - from the twist of the wrist, to the tips of their fingernails, the henna on their feet and hands, the expressions of joy, sadness, disgust, love. Sati, the daughter of the mountain, was contentedly plump while Parvati was all sharp edges from lovesick hunger. The illustrators were probably different people with two different styles, but in my mind, there was continuity as Shiva's life moved on from Sati to Parvati.

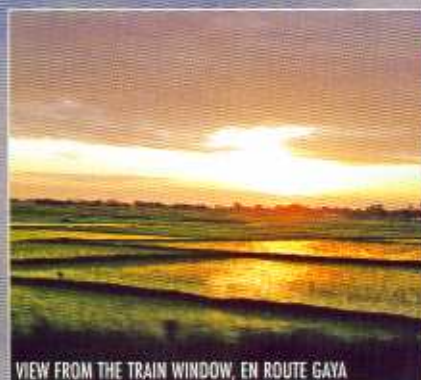
Would I have been as enamored with Amar Chitra Katha had I been a Christian or Muslim child in India? I suspect so. Hinduism, by virtue of its countless deities and demonic personalities, simply has a lot more stories to offer; but Amar Chitra Katha also published a large number of multi-faith and secular themed comics. I don't know about my childhood, but my adulthood would certainly have been poorer had I never read Amar Chitra Katha comics. ■

IN HER FREE TIME, LALITHA VISVESWARAN PREPARES TICKING FOOD BOMBS LOADED WITH BUTTER, SUGAR AND A SMATTERING OF FRENCH CURSE WORDS FOR PUBLIC CONSUMPTION. SHE HAS BEEN HELD CAPTIVE BY FELINES FOR MANY YEARS NOW. OTHER PREOCCUPATIONS INCLUDE BABY SEALS, RAIN FORESTS, GLOBAL WARMING, AND CELLULITE. LALITHA LIVES IN FREMONT, CALIFORNIA.

6,481 kms • Bodhi Gaya • Bihar

These are the things we were gifted enroute Bodhi Gaya— a 180 degree rainbow, fire, rain on the Ganga near Allahabad, a seriously bejeweled night sky. There were floods in several parts of Bihar, but Gaya itself was lush green and unaffected.

On our way to visit the Maitreya Project Universal Education School, we set out walking over fields. There is a motorable road, but we are admiring the scenery as only strangers in a town can. With us is Kabir Saxena, our host and principal of the school, faring much better in his monk's robes and slippers than us in our city slicker shoes — the fields are wet and clayey. Enroute we pass a cycle rickshaw with Japanese tourists, a cluster of dissolving mud hutments, and 80 foot Buddha of the most pristine beauty and unshakable calm.



VIEW FROM THE TRAIN WINDOW, EN ROUTE GAYA



GOAT NAPS IN THE MORNING SUN



MAHABODHI TEMPLE, BOOH GAYA

journey towards a good heart

THE INSPIRING STORY OF THE MAITREYA PROJECT UNIVERSAL EDUCATION SCHOOL

TEXT: AMBUTA PATIL PHOTOS: LUKE HAOKIP

6:30 am - Arrival at the School

We get to the school half an hour before it opens. There are a few children already there. "Why are they here this early?" I ask Kabir. "They like being here," says Kabir, "school is where they come to get away from their life for a bit." There is frequent evidence that children's life outside school is of consequence to the school. For example - instead of the arduous PE in the sun that many schools start their day with, the children here have a session of Yoga and meditation. "Malnourishment is a definite issue here. They have walked a long way to get here, and many will go back from school to help at home. A heavy exercise regimen in the morning sun, and there will be no choice but to let them sleep during class hours," says Kabir.

The children in this school are mainly from villages in a 3 km radius. The radius is specified in order to streamline the number of applications. The school offers education, mid-day meals, textbooks and uniforms - all free of cost. Which puts the management in the difficult position of picking 25 children from over a thousand applications annually. In special circumstances, a few boys are allotted hostel accommodation. There are refugee Chakma Buddhist monks from Assam for example. The rest are children of traders, farmers, daily wage workers, cycle rickshaw pullers.

7:00 am - Morning Assembly

We gather in a colour-infused womb of a room with red koba flooring. Assembly begins with a heartily sung morning prayer. This is followed by an exercise in concentration. A teacher calls out a string of completely unconnected numbers, "9, 37, -6, 2, 11, 1, 15". Everyone closes their eyes and sits, legs folded in vajrasana, hands in their laps. When they open their eyes, a few are called upon to call out the numbers in exact sequence.



MEDITATION TIME AT THE MORNING ASSEMBLY

Next, is short role play activity based on the Theme of the Month. They have themes for every month of the year that emphasize on different human qualities – in fact, one of the most distinctive things about the Maitreya school is this emphasis on human qualities. It is a constant struggle for the teachers to bring abstract ideas alive in a non-pedantic, real life way.

We end with a robust national anthem. I must admit I am unaccustomed to sincere morning assemblies. In most cases students need to be coaxed or threatened into even lip syncing with the singing, let alone lending an authentic note.

7:30 am - Interdependence

Classes are held indoors or outdoors, depending on how the teacher and students feel that morning. Inside every classroom are full size murals painted by the students and teachers. Not a wall in the school is bare or painted the terrifyingly generic off white that the world has come to prefer. Instead there are paintings of mountains, Madhubani compositions, decorative vines and flowers, an assorted pantheon of deities from a muscular Rama to Maitreya Buddha.

I sit in with Veena's 6th grade class. The classroom was rather hot, so we opt to just sit on straw mats in the verandah instead.

Classes begin with circle time. We gather to discuss the Theme of the Month – which happens to be 'Interdependence'. Divided into groups of five, children are asked to imagine a steaming bowl of boiled rice.

Papers and pencils are handed out, and a simple question asked of the class "How many people do you think have been involved in getting this delicious bowl of rice to you."

Many students come from agrarian backgrounds – children of farmers or labourers – and I am pleasantly surprised at how much of the process they have a great understanding of. Almost everyone trace the progression of events back to "Kisaan beej khareedta hai...." (The farmer buys seed) I wonder how many urban kids can relate their dinner to a *kisaan*. "Cut open a packet of Daawat Basmati rice," more like.

The list gets more and more interesting. There is a lot of discussion about whether or not the ox qualifies to be on the list. The men who pull the



"TO COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND ONE'S OWN PSYCHOLOGY, ONESELF, ONE'S OWN PHYSICS, I CALL THIS UNIVERSAL EDUCATION."

LAMA YESHE,
FOUNDER UNIVERSAL EDUCATION



ON UNIVERSAL EDUCATION

Universal Education is an approach to education that promotes the development of loving kindness and compassion, universal responsibility and wisdom.

These aims are achieved by promoting a "world view" based on an understanding of the nature of the mind and concepts such as cause and effect, impermanence and interdependence. Understanding these concepts and mastering practices designed to develop inner peace and mental control, constitute the core of the Universal Education method. The learning necessary to achieve these goals is integrated with "standard" subjects to ensure a balance is achieved with conventional educational outcomes, especially competency in the key learning areas of language, mathematics, science and social science.

The aim of the Maitreya School is to produce graduates with "good heart", sound ethical values and a sense of universal responsibility as well as the skills to support themselves and their families. We hope they will be motivated to work effectively in their communities and for the benefit of others. ■

plough, the ox, the labourer with the handcart, the ladies who thresh the grain, the shopkeeper who sells it, the cow whose dung mom uses to light the chulha, mom herself – a large lineup emerges. And without need for much dissection, it is apparent to everyone how much interdependence it took for a timely bowl of rice at dinnertime.

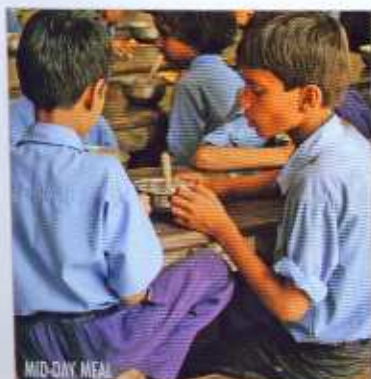
A simple discussion later, it is time for math class, which, as one child triumphantly announces, is going to be held under a tree today.

11:00 am - The Mid Day Meal

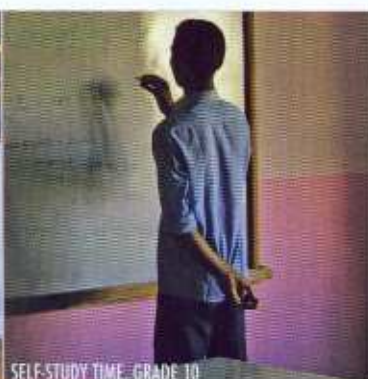
Time for a mid-day snack for the children. For many sitting at the tables, this meal will be their primary meal of the day. I have a chance to sit in with the

teachers during their tea break. The staff room has an array of reading material on its main table – *Tehelka* and *Outlook*, a coffee table book on Mongolia, a collection of Dalai Lama's teachings, and an Atlas of the World. The tea is rather good, and a discussion is on about how best to deal with a child whose behaviour has been disruptive in class for some weeks now.

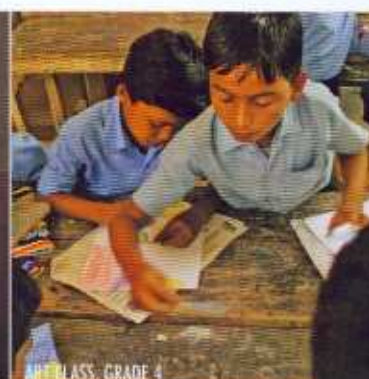
The curriculum being 'different' has created a need for teacher training that the school is now trying to meet. "We need special skills that, say, a Government School would not require.", says Vinay Kumar Varma, the Physics, Art and Craft teacher. "How we teach in this school", adds Devender Kumar Rai, who teaches Yoga and Meditation, 'is light years away from the kind of education we were given as children.' There is a lot of walking the talk involved, a lot of teaching outside of



MID-DAY MEAL



SELF-STUDY TIME, GRADE 10



ART CLASS, GRADE 4



KATHAK CLASS

the textbook. Corporal punishment is forbidden, and personal engagement with the student and the family are required. Kabir would like to see the training process taken to its next step, but the biggest challenge has been to find good trainers who can work in a rural setting, with non-English speaking teachers.

4 pm - Culture Time

Come 4 pm, and the whole school turns into a giant performance auditorium. Tabla, harmonium and *kathak* classes in full swing on the second floor. Sounds of group songs waft out from behind closed classroom doors. Preparations are already under way for the Annual Day in December - a spectacular event, Kabir tells me.

7 pm: Evening at Renaissance

In the evening, we travel with Kabir and ten boys from the higher classes to watch a play at the Renaissance theatre. They are excited. It's an evening trip for one, legit reason not to be home. It's also part of their beloved drama training. Not to mention that for many of these boys, a trip to Gaya is a highly uncommon thing. Some months back, Kabir organized a trip to the local railway station for a child who hadn't been to one before.

Part of the excitement is the Renaissance Theatre itself - a completely unexpected and opulent affair in the heart of Gaya - Doric pillars, well-equipped auditorium, large cafeteria, plush sofas, jukebox et al. A stream of nationally and locally recognized performing art and theatre talent makes its way through the year. Membership to the Renaissance is not cheap, but the philanthropic Sahai family (owners of the Renaissance) will frequently allow entry, gratis, to those who cannot afford the fee.

8:30 pm - Destination New Delhi and Patna

In the car on our way to the theatre, we had a long chat with the 9th grade boys. There was conversation about what careers they wanted to pursue when there were done with school. Computer Engineering figured prominently on the wishlist, as did working in a call centre or becoming a lawyer. Not a single child wanted to be a farmer. And even the ones who have never travelled outside their hometown were quite clear that they did not want to live in Gaya all their lives.

Kabir views this with mixed feelings. The debate about English education being the way to go is also something he is reluctant to embrace without questioning.

"There is a tendency for the children to start looking down on people in their own social circumstance. As soon as they learn to speak in English, many start looking down on those who can't. Most children think there is something wrong with being a farmer or working with the land. They think that going to Patna and Delhi and working in a BPO is the greatest thing to do."

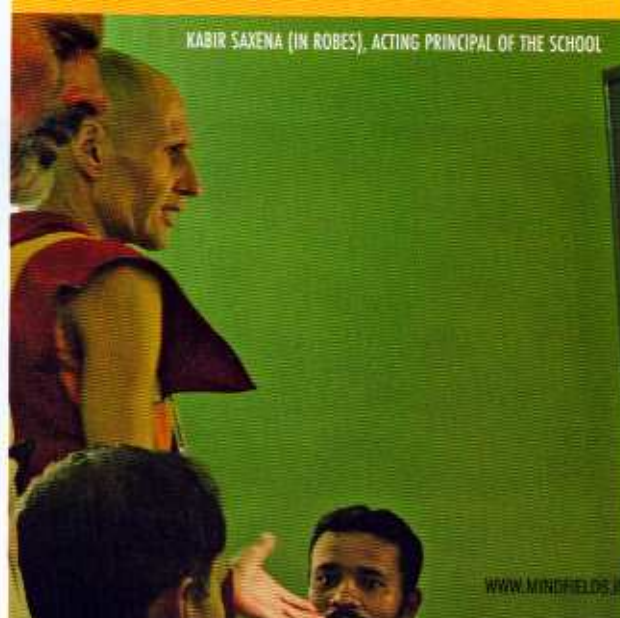
And therein lies the school's greatest challenge - of raising a generation that is proud of its proximity to the earth. A connection that is fast fading in urban landscapes. ■

KABIR'S STORY

Kabir Saxena graduated in Modern History from Oxford University, and is an ordained monk of the Gelugpa sect of Mahayana Buddhism.

I always had a love of the soil, nurtured by my Scottish grandfather on north London's sylvan expanse called Hampstead Heath. In teenage a reading of E.F. Schumacher, and later readings of Gary Snyder and Wendell Berry, (eco-warriors and poets both), in *Resurgence* magazine convinced me that urbanites are living on borrowed time and looking down at rural rustics at their own peril. Most of my friends now are from village backgrounds and my transition from Delhi to Bodh Gaya has been the best move of my life.

I have more than just a gut feeling that more and more of my countrymen are going to be leading lives of quiet and unquiet desperation if the abysmal social, moral and economic quagmire of the rural sector is not properly addressed. One major way to reverse the alarming degeneration is to restore peoples' confidence and dignity through genuine education and increase their living standards through a renaissance of small-scale rural technologies and village industries. The Gandhian vision has not been bettered as far as I can see. Hence when my teacher asked me to come and start a Buddhist centre in rural Bihar I readily agreed. I was already primed to metamorphose into another persona. And the chance to work in the school has helped me to begin to put the vision of an education that inculcates kindness and wisdom as well as the ability to earn a dignified living into practice. ■



ON SECULARISM IN EDUCATION

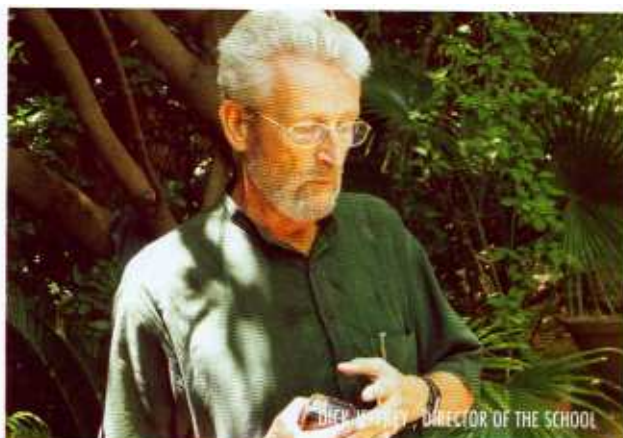
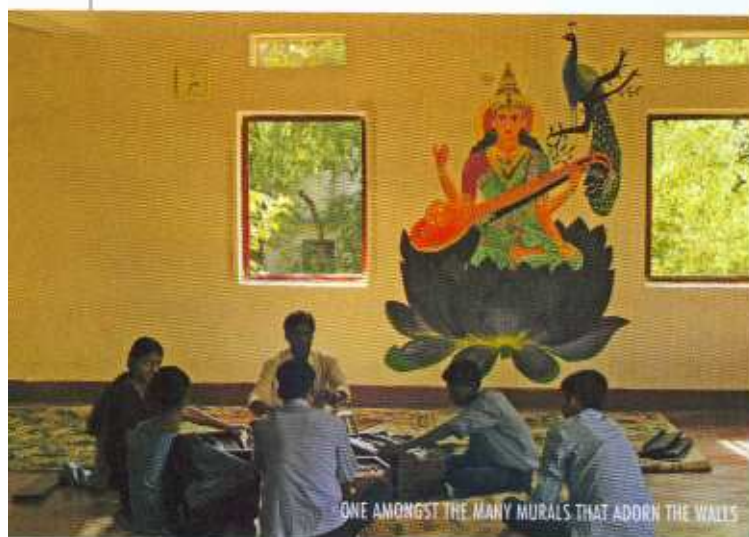
"For me, I'm afraid, this very word 'secular' itself is unfortunate. If it means, as my dictionary says it does, "not concerned with religion, not sacred," then I'm not interested, because for me the word religion means what its etymology implies, a relinking or reconnecting, (Latin: religare), with what is deep and most true and noble within my heart and mind. (Some may choose to call that god). Human beings are religious by nature in the sense that we all have an (often hidden) urge to re-establish a strong bond with the farthest/innermost reaches of our iceberg-like natures.

So at our school, where we are most concerned with equipping the child with the psychological methods to create the causes of lasting happiness for self and others through a profound and compassionate insight into one's own consciousness as well as into the world at large, we are confident that the student is intelligent enough not to get waylaid by the current nonsense, often dangerous, that passes for religious practice, will be able to digest what is useful and pass out what is superfluous and a threat to sanity.

Therefore we shall continue to have prayers from different religious traditions in our assembly and Awareness Programme, will continue to have pictures of saints of all faiths on our walls, will recite mantras and so on because it creates the conditions, by and large, for a wiser and kinder human being. I'd rather be with a kind Hindu or Muslim than with an angry, opinionated "rational secularist."

J. Krishnamurti said that it takes a great deal of energy to be able to get at the truth. I just don't think secularism has got what it takes." ■

KABIR SAXENA



DICK'S STORY

Dick Jeffrey has played a crucial role in advocacy, curriculum development and teacher training.

When I first became involved the Maitreya Project Universal Education School in 2002, it had around 120 students from KG to Class 5 and a building recently completed but lacking many facilities. The staff at that time comprised 10 teachers. I took on the position of principal and director, and we initiated our first teacher training program.

We've come a long way since then. Our student body now totals 480 with 350 studying in our daytime program, which now extends from kindergarten up to Class 12, and a further 130 children enrolled in our evening school program. Our staff has grown to 21 full-time plus 7 part-time teachers and 9 admin and non-teaching staff. The school curriculum has undergone a lot of development work and in 2005 was published in its current format. It is now available for download from our website (www.maitreya.org) and has been translated into French and Spanish. In 2006 our senior classes took national exams for the first time. So far the results have been good with 90% of students passing the National Institute of Open Schooling Intermediate examination. We are looking forward to even better results in the future. ■



LOOKING FOR A SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Looking for someone with initiative, flair, commitment to ethical & spiritual development, as well as academic achievement for the post of principal at our alternative coeducational K-12 School.

Applicants should be below 45 yrs of age, have post graduate qualifications & B.Ed, be fluent in English and Hindi. An attractive salary package will be negotiated. The successful applicant will join a large international organisation with plans for schools in Bihar & Uttar Pradesh.

Applications with photo and bio-data should be addressed to: "School Principal", PO Box 55, PO Bodhgaya, Gaya Dist., Bihar - 824231

PHYSIQUE OF A CHILD

TEXT: ASHISH RAJPAL (ADAPTED FROM HIS ADDRESS AT THE MONTESSORI CONGRESS 2007 BANGALORE)
PHOTOS: YOUREKA, STUDIO UMBILICAL

There has been much celebration of the resurgence of India, the 10 percent growth, the BPO jobs, the H1B visas. However, this world of plenty excludes many. If you draw a vertical line a little bit west of say, Ranchi; India is an extremely divided country to the right and left of that vertical. Which is why, in order to begin any conversation about a 'child of today', we need to specify *which* child we are talking about. My own work has been (so far) in the context of urban middle-class children. And these are the children I am referring to in this piece.

The last century was the age of physics they said, but many believe biology is going to overtake our lives like nothing before. I had the privilege of studying under Howard Gardner (proponent of the theory of rather fancily named Multiple Intelligences theory; author of 'Frames of Mind', published in 1984). Professor Gardner once mentioned to us later said about his path-breaking book, "I think the celebration for 'Frames of Mind' came too early. Had I written the book now I would write it completely differently."

Between 1984 and now, knowledge about the mind has changed dramatically. In the last twenty years we have learnt more about the brain than we knew in the last previous two thousand. No longer can the social sciences (including education) hide behind hypotheses. There is going to be verification by biology and we all have to be prepared for that.

THE MATTER ABOUT PAYING ATTENTION TO CHILDREN

The works of Maria Montessori, Piaget, Dewey and other legendary educators of the last century illustrated the fundamental truth - that children are not inadequate adults, but just different people. Profound, deep, sophisticated people. But understanding that they are different people and not Bonsai versions of adults takes a lot of effort. So "bring more attention to children" tops my wishlist. And these people *deserve* more attention.

As a society, in thinking about children one has to see where and what proportion of our resources (leaders, parliament, government or budgets) is going to be devoted children. So far, we have been unable to devote sufficient amount of energy, time or thought to their well being. The proportion of our resources devoted to children is both, inadequate, and unfair.

Just by sheer statistics, one-sixth of all mankind comprises of children. And yet, the well-being and nurturing of children doesn't take consume one-sixth of newspaper space, the budget, our GDP - and it certainly doesn't take comprise one-sixth of conversations in the parliament.

THE PARENTAL ROLE MODEL

When I was going to be a father, someone told me, "Remember two things. Till your children are ten years old they will do exactly what you say and after that, they will do exactly the opposite of that. So make use of those ten years."

Children don't always listen to you but they are watching you carefully. What we see in our children is what we are doing ourselves.

An important underlying trend in all of this which emphasizes itself over and over, is the role models adults make for children. It is startling to see just how impressionable children are when it comes to deciding what their physique should be like.

If their only role models are the ones on

television, and what they are seeing are hypermasculine or hyperfeminine models of what a good body is; then children are likely to have a deep sense of inadequacy about who they are and what they should look like.

There was an interesting research on six-year-old girls who play with Barbie dolls - with regards to how they tend to feel about their own bodies. In contrast with girls that hadn't experienced the Barbie doll phenomenon, the ones that *had* tended to harbour far more unrealistic notions about what their bodies should look like. Imagine a six-year-old whose playtime leaves her with the feeling, 'Oh, my god! I am a lot less attractive than Barbie'.

Giving children space and time to understand that each body is different, giving them alternate role models, making them feel good about themselves is extremely important.

THE CHANGING SHAPE OF CHILDREN

Today, the question of obesity overwhelmingly comes to the fore when we speak about the physique of a child. A cursory look at the literature around us, and you will see that what has happened to children in the developed world has now arrived on our shores.

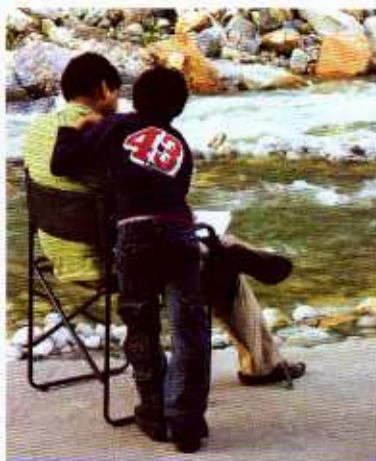
Children are fatter, unhealthier, less able to do things without being pushed and cajoled into doing them, than they were ever before. Some estimates in the USA predict that one out of two children is going to be obese.

Closer home I was going through studies done by Fortis Hospital in middle-class schools in Delhi; almost one child in three is obese and the estimate is not going to change for the better anytime soon. Probably two out of three are going to end up becoming obese adults. Obesity has assumed epidemic proportions. It is a bona fide disease.

Not hard to understand why. But in the kind of society we live in, there is serious unwillingness to devote too much time addressing any problem. Everything must come in a neat Problem + Solution packet (like Maggi Noodles + Tastemaker Masala), or else it is too much of a bother.

WHATS UP WITH THE FOOD, DUDE?

A critical aspect of obesity is not only lack of physical activity - it is food. A dangerous new development with today's world is what it has done with its food.



ONE-SIXTH OF ALL MANKIND COMPRISES OF CHILDREN. AND YET, THE WELL BEING AND NURTURE OF CHILDREN DOESN'T TAKE ONE-SIXTH OF NEWSPAPER SPACE, BUDGET, GDP - AND IT CERTAINLY DOESN'T TAKE ONE-SIXTH OF CONVERSATIONS IN PARLIAMENT.

I shudder to think about just how ignorant a parent I might have been, had I not undertaken the journey of becoming interested in school education.

Unless we are talking about Snow White's evil step mother, no parent wakes up in the morning and says, "I am going to harm my child today". And yet, you see the most well-meaning, otherwise sane parents shoving Cola and chips into the hands of their children.

A big phenomenon to influence the diet of children is packaged carbohydrates. Everything you ingest - from obvious suspects like chips and candy, to more innocuous things like cereal - has a dramatic influence on the chemical make-up of the body.

The substitution of packaged carbohydrates has come at the cost of fibre. The number of children who have carrots or fresh fruit has gone down because it is easier and more tempting to pick up readily packaged carbohydrates.

Since children are very often not well-informed, they cannot be held responsible. We - the adults, the management of MNCs and Indian companies in the packaged food business - need to look at what is happening to food in a more responsible fashion. It is having a direct impact on the health of children.

The second big phenomenon is sugar. Fifty years ago, the ratio of non-milk beverage consumed to milk consumed was 1:2, for children. Today, in most of the developed world, it is the other way around. If a child has a glass of milk, he is likely to have two cans of coke.

Sugar has obvious negative influences on the body. A lot of so-called modern diseases such as hypertension and hyper-activity which affect children, have a strong relationship with the food being consumed.

Anyone who is familiar with what is happening with the world of children knows that there is more and more prevalence of labeling of differences as "problems". Acronyms like ADHD (a form of attention deficit in children) are becoming more commonplace, getting more licence by way of children being categorized in that group. Similarly we hear more phrases like 'slow learners' and 'depressed kids'.

There was an interesting statistic about Ritalin (I think the study was in Australia), one of the drugs given to deal with attention-deficit. In societies where Ritalin



UNLESS WE ARE TALKING ABOUT SNOW WHITE'S EVIL STEP MOTHER, NO PARENT WAKES UP IN THE MORNING AND SAYS, "I AM GOING TO HARM MY CHILD TODAY". AND YET, YOU SEE THE MOST WELL-MEANING, OTHERWISE SANE PARENTS SHOVING COLA AND CHIPS INTO THE HANDS OF THEIR CHILDREN.

prescription is permitted, doctors prescribe it *ten times more* than in places where it is not permitted, diagnosis of attention deficit is higher.

All you need to do is give the license and say, 'Okay, this disease is allowed', and suddenly a lot of people start calling that disease legitimate. There needs to be a deeper analysis of why children are being categorized like this and more importantly - why children are behaving this way.

A CASE FOR OPEN SPACE

A marked difference between thirty years ago and now, is in the lack of open play spaces for children. Because everybody is interested in their own condo, their own apartment - a lot of private blocks are coming up with very

low investment in public spaces.

Also, asking your child to "go out and play" is a sentence that is a rapidly disappearing from the vocabulary of modern parents.

When I was a ten-year-old, I would walk a kilometer and a half, go to the Mother Dairy booth, put in a coin and bring the milk back home. On the way I'd stop and talk to a few people. I am not comfortable about my eight-year-old son or my ten-year-old daughter doing this in a place like Delhi any more. It's unthinkable.

My wife and I have conversations around 'what if this happens, what if that happens, the traffic on the road is ten times more.' Either incidences of molestation and child abuse have gone up, or the reportage has. People are definitely more aware and wary. The awareness comes at a huge price.

Unless there is some cognizant collective and organized effort, the absence of the outdoors in childrens' life will keep manifesting itself as some kind of labeled disease or the other. In the West, there has been a reverse movement towards creating safe spaces for recreation and play. However, my own prediction of what is going to happen in urban India is actually quite pessimistic. Things are going to get a lot worse before they get any better.

The responsibility to better this situation will increasingly depend on schools. There is a certain viewpoint that says that education will not happen unless you have a hundred-acre forest. Yes, that can happen for five hundred kids. But India has three hundred and fifty million children. If you are talking about a solution,

give me a solution which will work for most of them. Otherwise you don't get my attention.

To rethink the architecture of schools in urban India is to rethink the kind of urban spaces we will have to create - with ample activity and support for children.

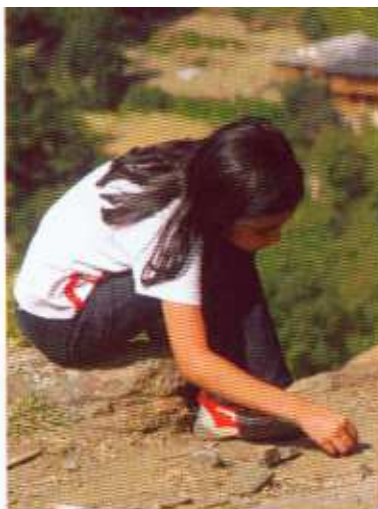
NATURE DEFICIT DISORDER

Something that is not getting much attention in India right now, but you will be hearing about more and more is our growing estrangement with the natural world.

This is addressed in a remarkable book by Richard Lowe - 'The Last Child in the Woods'. It speaks of a 'Nature Deficit Disorder'. Another label, I know, but perhaps a significant one. (see 'Reclaiming the Outdoors', *Mindfields Issue 1, 2007*)

I grew up in a cramped urban home, a situation which, in hindsight, was not very pleasant. But a highpoint of my growing up was that every year I went for a fortnight long trek in the Indian Himalayas.

Today, urban children are more and more cut off from nature. In fact almost two generations have been cut off



IT TAKES SIXTEEN TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR A HUMAN CHILD TO DEVELOP, A LOT LONGER THAN FOR ANIMAL CHILDREN OR BIRD CHILDREN. BUT IN THIS RESPONSIBILITY TO NURTURE CHILDREN, PARENTS ARE BEGINNING TO LOOK THE OTHER WAY.

from nature. So one hears of jokes like, 'Where do oranges come from? From the fridge.' But even if the exaggeration helps make a point - it is not that far from the truth.

I was recently at a coffee plantation at Yercaud in Tamil Nadu. While there I realised that in an environment as rich and peaceful as this, a child could learn more in one week - about things as diverse as coffee beans, wild bison, migratory patterns of birds - than she could at school in six months.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME

It takes sixteen to eighteen years for a human child to develop, a lot longer than what animal or bird children need. But in this responsibility to nurture children, parents are beginning to look the other way. We try to find solutions: schools, creches, day care. Raising children takes time. If we are unable to spend with children the kind of time they need, there will be repercussions to deal with later.

Time, and the regulation of it, is also relevant to questions like bedtime. The whole notion of routine stands challenged. There is clear evidence that children up to six could need twelve hours of sleep. On onset of adolescence, the need for sleep again goes up.

I recently met a harried mom at a parenting workshop. "My child is out of hand," said she. I asked her, "What time do you put your child to bed?" She was perplexed at such an seemingly unconnected question. "Why, whenever we go to sleep," she said. So I asked, "What time did you go to sleep last night?" "Midnight, maybe", was the answer. I said, "If a four-year-old's bedtime is midnight, that may well be something you want to look at. You don't need people like me to diagnose what the problem is."

For children, all the sense of stability, security, attachment comes through a notion of routine. In fact a lot of the collective Montessori human experience of growing-up is built around common sense principles are based on the notions/principles of routine and repetition. If you challenge those, you pay a very heavy price. ■

SO WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT ALL THIS?

RELOOK AT WHAT KIDS EAT

I am pointing out a fact-based concern that parents, teachers and children need to be taught about good food habits; and what is a good body and what is not. Most of us haven't received any meaningful food and body-related instructions in school.

GET DOCTORS INTO SCHOOL

Not to medically examine children everyday, but to help teachers observe children for long periods of time and make scientific observations. Scientific observation is missing in classrooms.

MAKE TIME FOR PLAY.

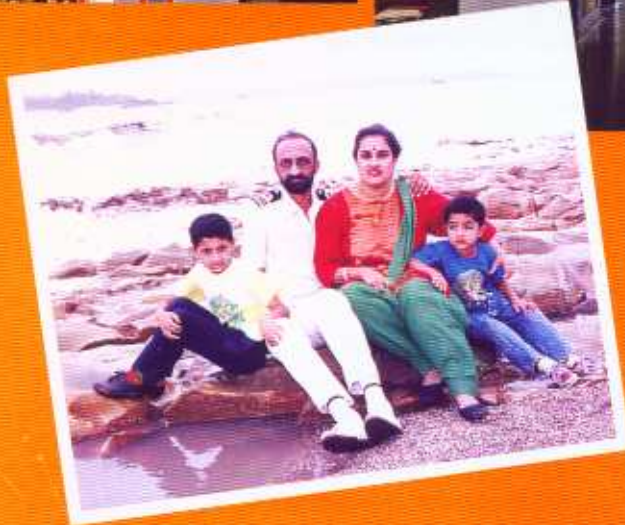
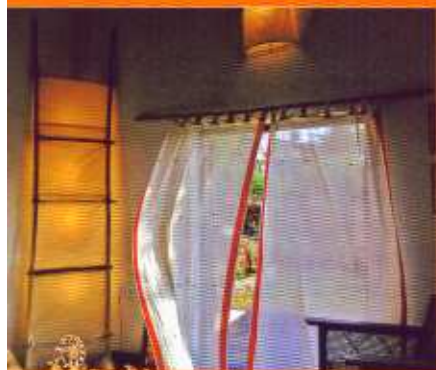
There are a lot of obstacles including how long the school runs and other things - but for a primary/middle school age group, ten hours a week should be mandatory playtime in the school calendar.

GET YOUR CHILD OUTDOORS

My eight-year-old climbs rocks. They love climbing trees. A bruise here and a cut there will heal itself. But a childhood devoid of adventure is permanent damage. ■

ASHISH RAJPAL IS THE MD OF IDISCOVERY EDUCATION. HAS AN MBA FROM XLRI AND ED.M (MIND, BRAIN AND EDUCATION) FROM HARVARD UNIVERSITY. TEACHES ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE TO GRADE 4. REGRETS NOT HAVING HEARD NUSRAT FATEH ALI KHAN PERFORM LIVE.

FIRST PERSON



Off the beaten path

the unusual home and house a family built

The Ananthnarayanans are the quintessential Mindfields family. 'Middle-class' in resource and background, they have proved that groundbreaking lifestyle is not store-bought. Without ado, Ananth and Janani have homeschooled their children, and raised them to be lateral thinking, well-adjusted, creative young adults.

Together, the family runs a weekly newspaper. Together, they have built a home that is as in tune with nature as they are. Ananth shares the experiences of building unusual and wholesome environments - emotional and spatial.

TEXT : CDR ANANTH NARAYANAN (RETD)
IMAGES COURTESY: SHRINIVAS NARAYANAN'S COLLECTION

THE FOUNDATION

Who would buy a plot on a rocky, impossibly steep incline? No one. No one except us, that is. In our hearts we knew that, used intelligently, the place had potential. In any case, it was all we could afford then.

Our sons, Shrinivas and Shivaram, were in a regular CBSE school till they were in Grades 9 and 7 respectively. They weren't "top of the class", but there was no cause for worry either, no reason to believe that they would not be able to stand on their own feet when the time came. They did find school a bit of a drag, though, monotonous and devoid of any concept building.

As parents, we had a nagging suspicion that the school-going exercise was not really productive. So we did not add to the kids' trauma by pressurizing them to "get good marks". In fact, a standing joke in our family was that their combined percentage would go over the distinction level with difficulty!

Both of them have been voracious readers from an early age. Afternoons were spent poring over National Geographic, Science Magazines, computer magazines, Cars & Bike. Maybe this was because of the lack of challenge at school, but more likely, it was because we never owned a TV set! So time *had* to be spent doing something else of interest. Shrinivas had a strong affinity to Robotics and basic electronics, Shivaram was deeply immersed into Origami - he has had Origami solo exhibitions at Chennai's Government Museum, Bangalore's Chitrakala Parishat, and Kala Academy, Goa...

AN UNUSUAL GROUND PLAN

We have found a kindred soul in architect Dean D'Cruz. Nothing about the house, we have decided, will be alien to its surroundings.

Things came to a head in November 1999 when the Nehru Centre, Mumbai invited Shivaram to set up an Origami exhibition and offered him a huge space in the Hall of Vision. It was a major event - an exhibition cum workshop, and he was the first child to ever have had a solo show there. Slight problem: the event clashed with the half yearly exams.

We, on our part, were clear about our priorities. The

school was unconvinced. His class teacher's response was unforgettable - "Origami is not everything!" After much pleading from our end, the Principal "allowed" him to write the exam later. We had been prepared for a zero mark, this was a pleasant surprise.



The exhibition and workshop got a terrific response - with coverage on TV and in national dailies. On his return, Shivaram wrote the exams and, predictably, did not fare as well as the school expected him to. At the end of that academic year, we took the decision to pull them both out of school.

RAISING AN IDEA, BRICK BY BRICK

The material is cheap and local (Mangalore tiles, polished cudda-pah floors), the 'technology' is indigenous (in the pipeline are plans for rainwater harvesting, water recycling, and operating the garage door with an old scooter battery, and using cowdung paste as insect repellent for walls).

The staggered living/dining room area and high ceilings give an illusion of great space. We need no artificial light in daytime.

Contrary to what it may seem like, the decision was not an impulsive one. There was no single moment of epiphany that homeschooling was 'The Way', neither was there a book or philosophy that made us change our mind. When we felt that the school system was not giving us what was required, we started looking for alternatives.

The National Open School (NOS) seemed to offer a viable alternative, Janani and I had done quite a bit of homework on the NOS. We were satisfied that it would be adequate for getting the boys to the next step - college, if required. All Universities including IITs recognize the NOS. In any case Shrinivas or Shivaram were not vying for a medical or engineering seat. Even *that* was attainable if one did well in the various All India entrance exams. Doing these after NOS or regular school was inconsequential.

As parents, we were not biting our nails wondering "What next?". Our line of thinking was pretty simple. Homeschooling was in no way a risk. Both of us were available at home. I had retired early from the Indian Navy - inevitable, considering that I don't have a conformist bone in my body. Janani and I were running

Vasco Watch (a free fortnightly newspaper) from a home office. We were confident that we could give the boys any academic assistance they needed. We had the basic co-ordinates in place to make this arrangement work for us. In that sense, the "switch" from conventional to unconventional schooling seemed like a very natural one.

That being done, Shrinivas went into the dreaded Grade 10 with no paralyzing worries about the future. Shivaram, on the other hand, needed to do *nothing* since you have to be fifteen years old NOS needed one to in order to write the Grade 10 exam. So he went into a two-year "sabbatical" from academics - did a lot of Origami, started preparing for his first book of original Origami designs, started learning the South Indian classical flute.

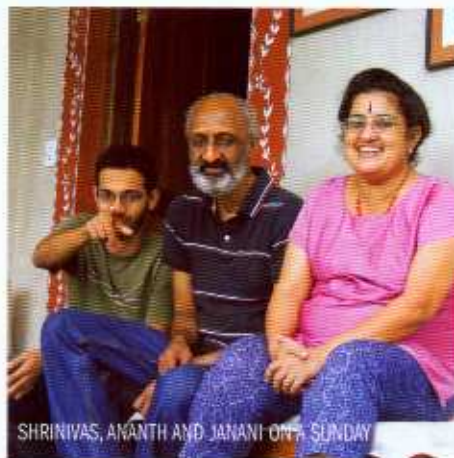
Shrinivas, got through Grade 10 without much ado. He did a course in Ornithology and Entomology - became an avid birdwatcher, volunteered for a 'Big Cat Census' of the Forest Department, and generally followed his heart. And all this in the one year break before he was eligible to write the Grade 12 exam.

We had none of the trauma of haphazard homework assignments, "extra classes", accusations of "your child is not getting enough marks". Parents don't realise how short the kids' childhood years are going to be until they are over. Janani and I cherish those years.

HOW THE GARDEN GROWS

We are completely involved in the house. Planning every little detail, savouring the process of creating things in keeping with our creative ideas and aesthetics. The boys have designed and constructed a wash-basin in their bathroom whose faucets are controlled by the handle bars of our old scooter. Janani's grandmother's bed base is now a diwan. This week, we had our first successful flowering of the biofuel plant jatropa. Some experiments are complete disasters. The house is like a person - work in progress. We are surprised by it every day!

To answer a question I have often answered - their being homeschooled did not mean that Shrinivas and Shivaram grew up in isolation. They had ample play time, ample uninhibited interaction with children from



all over the neighbourhood. They are not shy, shielded people raised in an airtight, scary universe where mom and dad are sun and moon. In fact, we challenge one another often, there is a lot of debate in the house. In their friendships and interactions, they are oblivious to peoples' chronological age.

Our convictions have not gone awry. Shrinivas has completed his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and has been offered a job with a leading ad firm in Delhi. Shivaram has finished his Grade 12 and plans to get a degree in Music from Chennai University - again, through distance learning. His origami has been getting him commercial work - with architects, interior designers and advertising agencies commissioning him to do projects that require expertise in paper folding.

I am also asked the inevitable question about rough patches or periods of despair. I don't recall any issues that are out of the realm of normal growing up. We never had second thoughts or felt we had done the wrong thing. In fact, oddly enough, it seemed so 'normal', we weren't conscious of doing something path breaking.

What we have learnt through experience, is that a world of opportunity and contentment is waiting - so long as you stick to your beliefs and strengths and don't go chasing some societal standards of what success means.

Our path may not be the ideal one for others to follow - peoples' home and work situations may not allow it. Each family has to work out their own best solution. And there is always one, if you bother to look for it. ■



SHIVARAM NARAYANAN'S BOOK OF ORIGAMI DESIGN ORIGINALS - 'FOLD IN FOLD OUT' (PUBLISHED IN 2005, PRICE: RS. 225) HAS BEEN LAUNCHED BY LANDMARK BOOKSTORE. FOR DETAILS ABOUT THE BOOK AND ORIGAMI WORKSHOPS, CONTACT SHIVARAM AT ORIGAMISHIV@GMAIL.COM

DO YOU HAVE AN INTERESTING STORY TO SHARE ABOUT YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES WITH ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION? DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE ELSE WHO DOES? SEND US A MAIL AT EDITOR@MINDFIELDS.IN. THE BEST STORIES WILL BE FEATURED IN MINDFIELDS 'FIRST PERSON'.

GET ACQUAINTED

NESTING TALES



EVENTS AT A MARSHALL'S ORIOLE NEST OVER A COUPLE OF WEEKS



TEXT: BASED ON A MARATHI ARTICLE BY SHRIKANT INGALHALLIKAR
PHOTOGRAPHS: SRIKANT INGALHALLIKAR, LUKE HAOKIP



You don't have to go to a bird sanctuary to observe the wonders of the bird kingdom. In fact, the most enjoyable part of bird watching is when you discover an active nest in your own garden. You realise that the bird has been a discreet inhabitant of your backyard for several seasons without letting you know.

If you are lucky enough to have a nesting bird right outside your window, all you need to do is watch from behind the curtain - it's your turn to be discreet now. The nesting bird is going to show up very frequently, after regular intervals of time.

Soon you will know just when to expect a feeding session to start.

Even if you have no feathered guests in your garden, a stroll in the local park can be an interesting place to begin your career as an ornithologist. Start by drawing up a list of birds you have seen in your surroundings. Most peoples' lists will start with 'crow, sparrow, myna, pigeon' - and end there. All that will change very soon.

What it takes to be a bird watcher is patience, alertness, a pair of binoculars and a good bird identification book - Salim Ali's *'The Book of Indian Birds'* is excellent. Re-focus your eyes and ears, notice the melodious bird calls or whistles, the flit-and-fly movements in the hedge or tree nearby. Jotting down your observations is a great discipline. See how many birds you will end up adding to your list in the weeks to come!





BIRDS THAT BUILD ELABORATE NESTS GENERALLY HAVE CHICKS THAT ARE HELPLESS AT BIRTH, AND NEED TO STAY IN THE NEST UNTIL THEY ARE STRONG ENOUGH TO FLY. IN CONTRAST, BIRDS THAT NEST ON THE GROUND, IN UNPROTECTED NESTS, HAVE CHICKS THAT ARE SELF SUFFICIENT ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AFTER BIRTH.

The nests of birds we see around us makes for interesting study. The wisdom and creativity in their structure and construction is mindblowing.

Most birds select a well-hidden place that is not easy to access, as the location for their nest. Security of the eggs is the prime concern. Nests that are not well-hidden use camouflage instead - they merge so well with the surroundings, it's hard to notice them even close range. Some examples would include the Thick Knee's nest on an open field (*above*); Crag Martin nests (*Pic 1*) built on walls and the underside of bridges; eggs of the Lapwing (*Pic 2*), laid out in the open but well camouflaged when seen from 10' away. The Fan-tailed Flycatcher's nest (*Pics 3 & 4*) has grass blades stitched at the outer layer and lies nestled at the base of grasses.

Each nest is shaped to snugly accommodate the eggs and leave room for the mother bird to sit atop them and give them the much-needed warmth. During this period the mother bird sheds her breast feathers to maximize the body heat the eggs receive. A constant temperature is maintained till the eggs hatch (it takes 1-3 weeks). The bird's partner feeds her during this time or in some cases, both parents share tasks. When the egg hatches and the chick comes out, the mother bird will carry the broken bits of egg shell away from the nest. Fewer telltale signs for a predator to find.

The chicks don't need to be fed for the first few

days. That will have to wait until they can sit up, hold their necks upright and open their beaks wide to be fed. They grow up very fast, and they need to be fed very frequently. You can hear them noisily demand food.

Droppings of the young ones are dexterously removed during the parents' feeding trips. They are constantly keeping a watch on the nest, and will give warning call



CRAG-MARTIN NEST



LAPWING EGGS



FAN-TAILED FLYCATCHER



FAN-TAILED FLYCATCHER

if they sense any danger in the vicinity - a sign for the chicks to become silent and freeze immediately.

In nature's food chain, smaller birds feed on insects; larger birds, cats, dogs or reptiles feed on smaller birds. The strongest offspring survive and nature has no time to mourn the loss of the weaker ones. On losing his/her eggs or chicks, the bird goes about laying new eggs.

The usual villains of deforestation, climate change and urbanization have made life harder for birds in their

natural habitat. They face scarcity of water, food source, and safe nesting places. Summers can be very harsh. You can do your bit to make their life easier by keeping a bird feeder (see below) and water bowl outside your house. But a seminal birdwatching rule to keep in mind is - do not try to make 'pets' of the bird you watch.

There is much to marvel at from a distance - the life of birds, their mating season and calls, the first flight of fledgelings. And it is infinitely more satisfying than watching them on a TV screen. ■



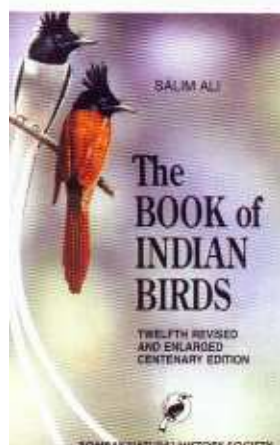
MAKE YOUR OWN BIRD FEEDER

You get readymade bird feeders, but it's more fun to make your own. And it isn't hard - either. Just make sure that there is adult supervision during the activity.

The feeder is made from an old tennis ball container, a cheap plastic frisbee and a couple of wooden kebab skewers, which protrude equally on each side. The size of the feed holes is important: big enough to let the seeds out but not so big that they fall out. Vary the feeder hole sizes to allow birds with large and small beaks to access the feeder. The skewer holes can be made with a piece of red-hot nail.

Drill small holes in the frisbee base to allow rainwater to drain off. Hang the feeder securely with wire or string - in a shaded place, maybe under a tree.

Try putting in an assortment of grain - *bajra*, *jvari*, rice, pumpkin and sunflower seeds. If a lot of seed spills over (as they well might), you might end up with a surprise garden as well! ■



THE BIRD MAN OF INDIA, AND HIS BIRD IDENTIFICATION BOOK

Dr. Salim Ali (1896-1987) was born into a Muslim family in Mumbai, the tenth and youngest child.

He was introduced to the study of birds by W. S. Millard, secretary of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) who helped him identify an unusually coloured sparrow that he had shot for

sport. This event led to Salim's pursuit of a career in ornithology (study of birds).

Ali failed to get an ornithologist's position at the Zoological Survey of India due to lack of sufficient academic qualifications, after which he decided to study further in Germany. He was hired as guide lecturer in 1926 at the newly opened Prince of Wales Museum in Mumbai.

Ali undertook systematic bird surveys of the princely states, Hyderabad, Cochin, Travancore, Gwalior, Indore and Bhopal, under the sponsorship of the rulers of those states.

He wrote "My chief interest in bird study has always been its ecology, its life history under natural conditions and not in a laboratory under a microscope. By travelling to these remote, uninhabited places, I could study the birds as they lived and behaved in their habitats."

Ali was influential in ensuring the survival of the BNHS, the Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary and the Silent Valley National Park. In 1990, the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History was established at Anaikatty, Coimbatore.

SALIM ALI'S 'THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS' (OXFORD UNIV. PRESS, ISBN 019566523, RS 495) IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF ANY INDIAN BIRD WATCHER'S BOOK COLLECTION.



the woods are lovely dark and
deep but i have promises to keep
and miles to go before I...

sleep?

POETRY'S *lubs and dubs*

TEXT: KAUSHIK RAMU
ILLUSTRATION: STUDIO UMBILICAL

We walked down the stairs to the station's flea market; a slow, polyphonic melody spread in our minds, with a sense of jungles and freshwater, till there was little else. There they were: ragged-haired strangers playing drums, their heads heaving up and down like buoys on the sea. Their beats formed a pattern with a mind of its own, a great mosaic beast breathing in and out, and their fingers rose and fell like the valves of its heart.

I think of words as little bands of musicians who come on stage, each with an instrument, to perform for us. The recital of a word like 'voodoo' is different from that of a word like 'Pyong Yang' or 'sheepskin', and this imparts music to what we say and write, as if we spoke not just with units of meaning, but with bagpipes, conches, banjos, bass-drums...

This article's about music- and particularly about rhythm- in words. If you're new to the idea, try reading these lines aloud, and if you like rap music, try rapping them:

*Then I saw the Congo, creeping through the black,
Cutting through the forest on a golden track...
Then I heard the boom of the blood-lust song
And a thigh-bone beating on a tin-pan gong...*

What is it about these lines that's given them this prancing, eerie, ritualistic beat, this sense of sweaty movement in a dark, disquieted jungle? They're by the poet Vachel Lindsay, and they're very alive aren't they, quite like those drummers.

You have to *perform* such lines. There's only so much blackboards are for. I recommend that teachers do what the 'barrel-house kings' in *Congo* did- remembering of course to close the door:

*Sagged and reeled and pounded on the table,
Pounded on the table,
Beat an empty barrel with the handle of a broom...*

One of the many reasons why good poetry's enjoyable is that the words- the spades and sickles of our minds- come alive as if they've found one another in a crowd, line by line, to create something like a song, something with a pulse and an eye. In that sense, I think poetry's closer to music than to essays and long answers to twenty-mark questions.

I remember this awful fill-in-the-blanks question from around the sixth standard:

*Whose _____ these are I think I know.
His house is in the _____ though; (2 marks)*

In high school we memorized and recited *The Tiger*, with boys and girls in columns from the left to the right taking turns to rise, deliver and collapse, two stanzas each:

*'WHAT immORTal HAND or EYE
Could FRAME thy FEARful SYMmetRY?'*

Poor Blake. How we brayed! That's what poetry was to me: a ride on a wooden horse, a reminder of nursery rhymes but with difficult words and by white-wigged Englishmen.

Then the wheels of adolescence turned. The politics of dorm-life made one cynical about poems. They either

were mushy and flowery, or they exhorted you- irritatingly- to arise and go forth and that sort of thing. Spy-thrillers were better!

A poem that came alive for me was D.H Lawrence's *Snake*. It was taught by an elderly, soft-voiced Biology teacher when our English teacher was on leave. He read with a strong Kannada accent, but he read it sombrely, pausing, looking up with a dawning wonder, repeating, examining words as he would specimens in his lab; there seemed to be no sound other than his quavering intonations. He kept aside his knowledge of Phylum Chordata and Order Squamata. "What do you feel," he asked, "when he says this?"

*In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark
carob tree*

*I came down the steps with my pitcher
And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he
was...*

He seemed to savour the words, searching minutely for colour, texture, melody...I now imagine it might have been because Kannada is a richly vowelled language, and his manner of reading stretched the notes, exaggerating and embellishing them; maybe he was reading *Snake* as he might have read Kannada poems that had moved him deeply:

*He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,
And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips...*

That *Snake* class was the first time I felt that every word has an innate music of its own, a certain nakedness of spirit that would emerge if you listened for it. Every line has its patterns of sound. Lines could have predictable patterns, as in "Jack and Jill went up the hill", or patterns that tease, or patterns in disarrayed heaps. We aren't usually aware of it- because there are trains to catch and offices to reach- but every sequence of syllables- whether in poems or prose or insurance policies- has its percussion.

Feet are the term for what a line of poetry moves on: each foot has syllables arranged in a certain way. The bothering about feet and how they're used is called *metre*.

In English, every word has a peak stress, an accent: the word 'antelope' has it placed on the first syllable; the word 'automatic' has it placed on the third. You might

want to use numbers to see how the stresses vary within a word, although I'm not too fond of doing that.

'Terrible', a word with 3 syllables, would be a 3-1-2 distribution, with 3 being the peak stress. If you're game and have nothing better to do, plot graphs!

Another handy way to denote variations in stress is to use symbols: if we use '-' for an unstressed syllable and '*' for a stressed one, the word 'English' is a | * - |; 'Italian' is a | - * - |.

Here's a spoon of the exquisite: Nissim Ezekiel's 'Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher':

*And there the women slowly turn around,
Not only flesh and bone but myths of light
With darkness at the core, and sense is found
By poets lost in crooked, restless flight,
The deaf can hear, the blind recover sight.*

The pattern here is called the iambic pentameter and it was to rhythm in verse what the front-foot defense was to batting in cricket. Its basic unit is the iamb: a foot of two syllables, in which the second has a higher stress than the first, as in [*the deaf*].

The iambic pentameter has five iambs arranged in each line. Armed with our symbols - and *. Let's listen carefully to the first two lines now, like a doctor with a stethoscope:

- * - * - * - * - *
And there | the wom | en slow | ly turn | around
- * - * - * - * - *
Not on | ly flesh | and bone | but myths | of light

The pattern has a steady, rising effect and used to be very popular. Much of Shakespeare's verse is in this form, even in his plays; Milton's 'Paradise Lost' has over ten thousand lines, all in iambic pentameter.

It's convenient to have five feet to work with, and it serves as an excellent base on which to experiment with, and weave, other patterns. It's fun- and reasonably easy- to make up your own iambic feet, if you don't mind the odd rotten egg from the crowd:

*To write in iambs is a piece of cake;
But do they have a soul- or are they fake?*

It doesn't always have to be a *ding-dong* sort of variation. It can be as subtle as you like. We don't live in Milton's time, of course, and I personally think iambic

feet are best used to build a disguised, underlying rhythm for what at first seems irregular. Consider this:

- * - * - * - *
The un| purged im| ages | of day| recede
- * (-) - * - * (-) - * - *
The em| peror's drun| ken sold| iery are| abed

This is from Yeats's 'Byzantium'. I'll try and scan it using *numbers* instead of symbols. I swear I don't do the 1-2-3 business when I read poetry, but it helps illustrate that stresses are *relative*, and you can thus have an underlying effect without using overt patterns:

1 2 3 4 1 2 1 4 1 4
The un| purged im| ages | of day| recede
1 4 1 4 1 4 1 2 1 3
The em| peror's drun| ken sold| iery are| abed

How subtly and implicitly the five feet in the first line create an iambic effect, and how delightfully free we are from the predictable da Da, da Da, da Da, da Da, da Da! So it doesn't have to be a 1-4, 1-4 variation; if it were, it would sound like a nursery rhyme- and *that* might be useful if you're making fun of someone, as Cowper is here:

*And up he got, in haste to ride,
But soon came down again*

There's more to metre than iambic feet, and certainly *much* more to poetry than metre; I'm afraid I'll turn this into a user's manual... Instead of an iamb you can, for instance, use a *trochee*, a foot with a high stress is followed by a low; it has a steady falling rhythm and it can, as in these lines sung by the clown in 'Twelfth Night', impart a tender sadness:

- * | * - | * - | * -
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,
* - | * - | * - | *
Youth's a stuff will not endure

You could also deploy iambs and then replace them in strategic places- it's often the first foot of a line- with trochees. It could have interesting effects: reversal, impatience, resolve, surprise, a question... Here are some simple iambic lines with a bit of a makeover:

* - | - * | - * - *
Into my heart an air that kills

- * | - * | - *

From yon far country blows

The first line has four feet, the second three. They're essentially iambic, but the first line begins with a trochee. I like such lines: there's a bit of a flourish, like the swish of a matador's cape, and it cheers you up if you're bored of endless *ding-dong* processions.

If you'd like a faster tempo, unstressed syllables help, as in *And the tiger came charging and ate us all up*. Stresses slow things down: *Lone snails stare bleak, blank stares*. A foot with two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed one is called an *anapaest*: | - - * |.

If you like fast-paced lines, you could brew them strongly with anapaests. Poets have generally found them useful in what we might call action-sequences. This is by Tennyson:

- - * | - - * | - | * * | - * | -
And the hooves of the horses beat, beat, the hooves of

- * | - *
the horses beat

See how the two stressed syllables in *beat, beat* slow the line down, and the anapaests speed it up; they've been used together to create an intensity of cathartic, elegiac yearning. Limericks have used anapaests well too: our action-foot can also be a comic one.

*There was this young lady from Niger
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger.
They returned from the ride
With the lady inside
And the smile on the face of the tiger.*

You can impart to lines a galloping rhythm, a stumbling rhythm, an exaggerated and silly rhythm, a broken rhythm- any kind. *There are no rules or formulae*. Some poets have used free verse with a constant number of peak stresses in each line.

Some like varying the *lengths* of syllables; apparently this doesn't work as well in English as it does in classical languages like Greek and Sanskrit. You could try it though: the syllables *clip*, *clot* and *cleave* all have stresses, but clearly *clip* is the shortest and *cleave* the longest.

I've felt sometimes that this business of metre is pedantic hogwash and that when you write you must pour it all out without counting stresses and pauses. I



NEXT TIME YOU'RE ON A TRAIN, LISTEN TO THE WHEEL-AND-TRACK BEATS. AS A MOTIF, THEY OFTEN HAVE SOMETHING LIKE | - * | - * - |. YOU COULD TRY AND WRITE SOMETHING IN STEP.

A POET WROTE THAT THE BEATING OF THE MOTHER'S HEART, LUB-DUB, LUB-DUB, WHEN THE BABY'S WAITING IN THE WOMB, IS IN IAMBIC FEET: IT IS OUR PRIMAEBAL MUSIC, OUR FIRST TASTE OF POETRY.

would say, though, that a facility with metre helps you sense and create interesting effects on the ear.

If you wish to explore metre further, a good way to begin is to read poems and *scan* their lines. Joyce's *Chamber Music* has mellifluous love-poems in simple metre. Hopkins wrote in 'sprung rhythm', an intriguingly bounding, full-of-life metre that's wonderful when the lines are read aloud. When you've got a grip on scansion, you could turn to free verse, and see how the lines sound keener, more delicate in their balances, and how they roam about their stage like masked actors performing to music. Take E. E. Cummings:

*the queer
old balloonman whistles
far and wee
and bettyandishel come dancing*

The beauty of it is in the sensibility: standard patterns can- and must- be cast aside, but through them, one learns to detect finer nuances of sound and cadence and the complex relationships that words share. Everything then assumes a rhythm: the dripping of a tap, the thudding of taxi-doors, the coming and going of trains, chips in a friend's mouth as she crunches them, footsteps, tides, the pooping of pigeons. Life is never the same again! ■

KAUSHIK RAMU HAS AN MBA FROM IIM (B) AND A B.E. FROM NIE MYSORE. HIS INTERESTS INCLUDE ARE SUSTAINABLE LIVING, EDUCATION, PHOTOGRAPHY, TEST CRICKET, SECOND-HAND BOOKS, LONG WALKS, AND VERSE WITH TEA.



HOW TO VISIT

DELHI BY METRO

TEXT: SHAGUFTA BEAROWAY
PHOTOS: LUKAS HAAKE

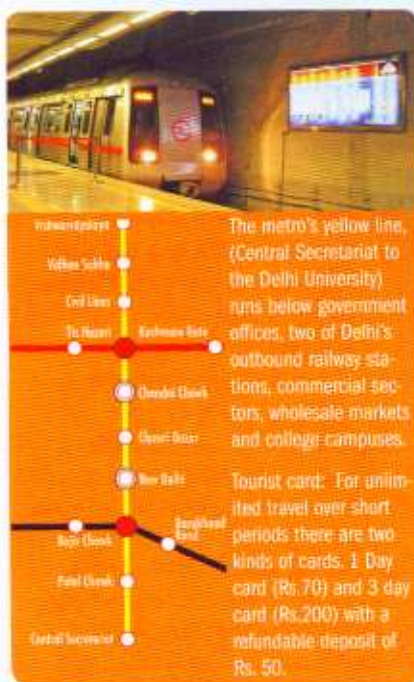
Growing up, I was quite uninspired by the history around me. A visit to the Red Fort, and a meal at Karim's summed up all that Old Delhi had to offer. Places like Kashmiri Gate were congested spare part markets, inaccessible to human beings and of only vague, if any, historical merit. The 90's were a turning point. Walks organized by the Conservation Society of Delhi and the India Habitat Centre took us into Delhi's forgotten past. INTACH's 'Delhi : The Built Heritage', and William Dalrymple's travelogue, 'City of Djinns' inspired people like me to re-discover Delhi.

The problem always remained of how to access the labyrinth of the old city. Congested roads and bad public transport made it a daunting thought. In September 2002, Delhi, the city of seven historic capitals, received one of the greatest gifts of the early 21st century - the Delhi Metro. The Metro has made commuting effortless and fast, connecting Delhi's diverse populace and bringing many living and abandoned Delhis together. Our tour will cover some of these.



Our first stop is at the very heart of Lutyens's Delhi (named after one of the city's chief architects, Edwin Lutyens). After the British decided to shift their capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, a Delhi Town Planning Committee was set up with some of the prominent landscapists, city planners, architects, horticulturalists and engineers as its members. This committee with Lutyens as one of its chief members designing offices and official residences for the Imperial Capital.

The name of your first station, Central Secretariat signifies a large number of public and central gov-



ernment offices nearby.

This becomes especially clear when you rise out of the station exits to see some of the most authoritative public offices in India. Begin with the exit that says Rail Bhawan. The other exit for Krishi Bhawan takes you to the Boat Club and India Gate.

This exit leads you to the South Block and Rashtrapati Bhawan that stand on a low hill called Raisina. The buildings that you see here and in the surrounding area were built in the early 20th century as core of the Imperial City.

Despite attacks by modern city planners and architects for a hastily planned city centre, the committee's intention of architectural display and imparting a strong dignity to the government buildings is amply achieved even in the 21st century. The view of the grand axis remains unsurpassed.



Walk to the intersecting roads ahead of you for a view of the grand axis. Right above elevation in the centre is the Rashtrapati Bhawan (the President of India's residence), flanked by the North and the South Blocks at the slope of the hill. It is worth the exercise to climb up the hill for a close up.

Used by the British Governor-General as his official residence and for formal functions and ceremonies, the purpose of this grand building has not changed much even today. The most striking fea-

ture of the Bhawan is the dome, said to have been a curious mixture of the Sanchi stupa and dome of the Pantheon in Rome.



Each year during spring, the formal gardens of the Rashtrapati Bhawan (popularly called Mughal Gardens) are open to public.

Walk back. India Gate, a 138 feet high arch faces you. You pass by the North Block (on your left) and the South Block (right) designed by Herbert Baker. The North Block comprises of the Ministries of Finance and Home Affairs while the South Block houses the offices of the Defence and External Affairs as well as the Prime Minister's Office. Entrance is free but prior permission is required. The vista is ideal for photography, especially around the 26th January when the entire axis is lit up.

India Gate, the great epicenter in the city holds tremendous significance in Delhi's daily visual culture. A memorial for the soldiers who died in the Anglo-Afghan Wars and World War I was completed in 1931. An addition in form of an eternal flame was added in 1971 to commemorate countless unknown soldiers who died in the Indo-Pak Wars. Cutting the ceremonial and proces-

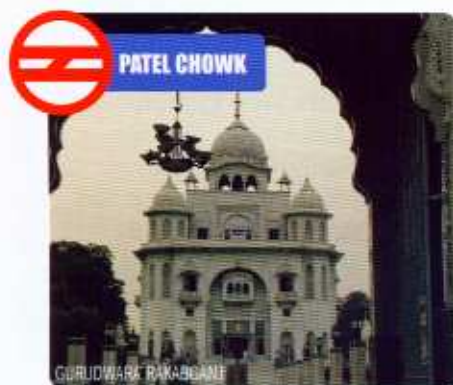


Though the route is relatively less crowded on Sunday (the commercial and business centres are closed that day), the visual appeal of some of the sites is lost. Crowds and the daily activities of many areas of the city form as much interest as the historic sites.

sional road of Rajpath (originally called Kings Way) on which you are walking presently is the Janpath (originally Queens Way) or the 'People's path'. The The National Museum (open all days except Sunday, 10-5) and the National Archives Museum (same as the National Museum) are on either side of Janpath from this quarter.

About a kilometer of a walk southwards crossing the Bhawan would lead you to what remains of the original village of Raisina. A small and quiet Sunehri Masjid (18th century, Sunehri Bagh Road) is the only living testimony to the pre-Lutyen's Delhi in this area. The other pre-Lutyens remains can be seen in the Flagstaff House, now called Teen Murti Bhawan. Opposite the Nehru Planetarium is a 14th century structure, believed to be one of the hunting lodges of Firoz Shah Tughlaq. Incidentally one of the roads leading to the Teen Murti Bhawan is 'Kushak' (Tughlaq hunting lodges) Road.

Move back to the Metro station.



This stop is best for a walk to the Parliament and Gurudwara Rakabganj. Visiting the Indian parliament is a unique experience, the building itself is quite imaginative. Each of the chambers in the parliament, owing to its circular shape, is semi-circular that meets with a central circular chamber connected through lobbies. The central chamber is of great significance in



Indian history. It was here that Pt. Nehru made a moving declaration of Independence speech.

A bit of a walk from the Parliament would lead you to the historic Gurudwara of Rakabganj which is the crematory site of the ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur. Two Gurudwaras on this tour are related to events in the ninth Guru's life. Most of the present day gurudwara is a modern construction.

A 15 minute walk would take you to 18th century Jantar Mantar, another pre-Lutyen monument. Built by the Sawai Jai Singh, whose grandfather owned land in this area, the observatory is a replica of the one in Jaipur. The most interesting of the six astronomical instruments must be the Samrat Yantra. The astronomical observatory forms an interesting spot for photography.



Rajiv Chowk station is the biggest and most crowded station. Take the underground yellow line to Vishwavidyalaya to continue this tour.

This station opens into the shopping district of New Delhi, Connaught Place. This interestingly

Trees in New Delhi were planted with great care - one type or sub-type for each road. Pradip Kishen's 'Trees of Delhi' is an invaluable companion for your walks.



designed arcade houses some of the oldest shops in New Delhi. Theatres (Regal, Rivoli and Odeon) and shops like Ram Chandra and Sons, Delhi's oldest toy shop (next to Odeon), Nath Brothers, Roop Chand Jewellers, Wengers (Inner Circle), Delhi Photo Company, Lawrence and Mayo (Janpath side) have always dotted the concentric circles.

Shiv Narayan Pandey, the ever-popular paanwaala in C.P. owing to his distinguished clientele is a proud possessor of a Husain painting. Jawaharlal Nehru was a regular customer - as were several politicians and filmstars.



While in C.P., it is almost customary to binge at Wengers (1926) pastries. During Christmas, the queues are rumored to cover the entire block. From the outer circle, you can take two short walks to the Baba Kharak Singh Marg to visit the historic Hanuman Mandir. Although nothing historic remains here, it is an interesting cultural space for an evening. Across the mandir are the state Emporiums with handicrafts and utility products from fifteen Indian states.

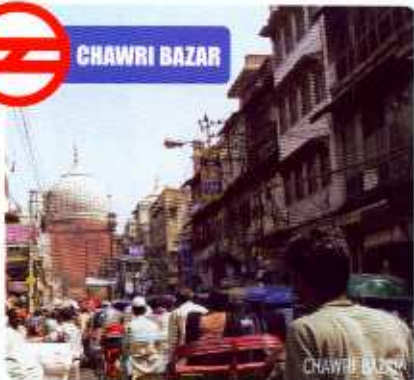
Walk further ahead to the Bangla Sahib, another historic Gurudwara believed to be the house (*bangla*) where the eighth Sikh Guru spent time healing people. Forming a busy roundabout at the end of the road is the Gol Dak Khana (1934).



Walk towards Gol Market, on your left is Jhandewalan (3 km, Rs 30 by auto). Straight ahead is the eating artery - the historic Kalevas (Bangla Sahib Marg) serves over 500 varieties of sweets and snacks. The next stop (New Delhi Railway Station) isn't of great interest except for the Ajmeri Gate nearby.



CHAWRI BAZAR



Your next stop is activity-filled and immense satisfying to the true explorer. Time to secure your bags and belongings. At the Chawri Bazaar station, two very different walks are possible. At Hauz Qazi Chowk are two exquisite mosques of the 18th and 19th centuries. Right opposite the station exit is the Masjid Hauz Qazi, an INTACH information board gives the history of the mosque.

The second walk at Chawri Bazar takes a longer route. We go in an overwhelmingly dense area but this is a rewarding walk. Start walking down Chawri Bazar Rd toward the Jama Masjid, surrounding you is a sea of hardware stores; the first floors of these shops were once houses of some of the most famous courtesans of Delhi. Close to J.K Card

Manufacture and India Metals (3633, Chawri Bazar) is the exquisitely carved Masjid Nawab Ruknud Daullah. Thirteen easy steps can transport you to the golden age of mosques in India.

The façade of the mosque is worth noting. The mosque is about 200 years old. Entrance free, men and women allowed.



Right opposite the mosque is a lane that becomes Churiwala (Bangle makers' quarters). Note the awnings and the supporting brackets on the side walls of this haveli. Several Bollywood films have been shot in these premises.

Deepa Mehta's '1947: Earth', set against the backdrop of the partition, was shot in Old Delhi.



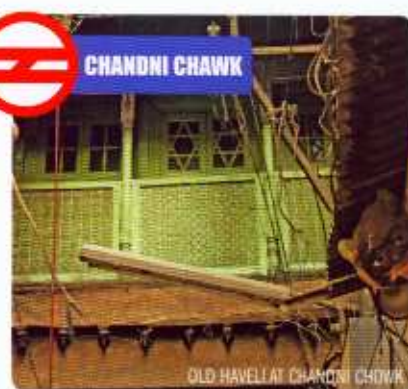
es.

Your last stop is Ghalib Haveli, where Mirza Ghalib, India's most quoted Persian and Urdu poet, lived in the mid 19th century in this area. He shifted many residences - however, a heavily altered haveli has now been designated 'Ghalib Haveli' by MCD and INTACH. Entry is free and there is an interesting exhibition there.

Opposite the haveli is a beautiful heritage building of the Hindustani Dawakhana. Nearby towards the north is Sharif Manzil, haveli of Delhi's greatest Hakim, Ajmal Khan. His descendants continue to live in the haveli.



CHANDNI CHAWK



Your walk ends here.

Our next stop is Chandni Chowk, the famed avenue of Shahjahanabad, Shahjahan's 17th century capital. The metro exits take us to five different centuries juxtaposed upon each other. The 17th to 21st centuries can be seen here. You can see a clear axis that runs from the Lahori Gate of the Red Fort through to Fatehpuri Masjid at the far end of the long road. In the 17th and 18th centuries, caparisoned elephants, couriers on horses and noble women in *palkhis* passed this busy avenue.

Red Fort (open sunrise to sunset, Rs 10) was the one of the two focal points of the new city Shahjahan laid out in 1638. The fort and its buildings, though heavily altered and demolished, are a testimony to the great aesthete Shahjahan was. After the revolt of 1857 (Mutiny, First War of independence), the British army took over the fort and built quick-fix



Red Fort barracks.

Ironically, the colonial buildings stand out more prominently than the Mughal ones.

Of interest are the *jalīs* (screens) of the *Khaas Mahal*. Peep through dusty



MUGHAL GARDENS AND BUILDINGS WERE DEMOLISHED CONSIDERABLY TO MAKE WAY FOR NEW BUILDINGS. IT IS NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO IMAGINE LINES OF GREEN TREES AND A CANAL RUNNING THROUGH THE ROAD

DIVIDER NOW BUT IN ITS HEY DAY, CHANDNI CHOWK, THE MOONLIT AVENUE WAS SURROUNDED BY BEAUTIFUL HAVELIS AND MUGHAL GARDENS.

IMAGINATION AND COMPARISON WITH THE MINIA- TURES OF THE PADSHAHNAMA (PUBLISHED BY THE FREER GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON D.C. THE ORIGINAL IS NOW IN THE WINDSOR CASTLE LIBRARY) WOULD REVEAL THE DAYS OF GLORY WHEN THE PRIVATE PAVILIONS AND PALACES FAC- ING THE YAMUNA (PRESENTLY THE M.G. ROAD) WERE ALIVE.

windows into (the now closed) sunken pools and flooring of the hamam. Outside the fort faces the bustle of daily life in the Old City. On your left is the dramatically modern Digambar Jain Lal Mandir. It houses a bird hospital where wounded birds are treated and set free (not for the weak of heart). On the same side of the road, about 50 meters after, is a historic Gauri Shankar temple. On your right is Lajpat Market, created for refugees from Pakistan.

Take a deviation here to turn left into Dariba Kalan. The famous Jalebiwala on the edge of the lane has served many generations. Dariba Kalan was the jewelers market, and proximity to the fort was directly related to the nature one's profession. The first nar- row lane on your left on Dariba Kalan road will lead you to Khajanchi Haweli - exquisitely carved, once a centre of great cultur- al activity, now abandoned by the family members. The courtyard was central to all activities in a *haveli*.

Return back to the Dariba Road. Walk through jewelry and medal shops,

take the first right after Sri Ram Jewellers. You have now entered Kinari Bazaar, wholesale market for decorations and embellishments. Towards the far end of the lane is a beautiful example of community liv- ing - the neighbourhood of nine houses or Naughara.

Exit Naughara and turn left towards the saree shops, then right to enter the Paranthi Waali Gali; highly recom- mended are the Rabri Paranthas. From here you can reach the main avenue again. Turn right to the Sees Ganj Gurudwara, built close to the site where the ninth Sikh Guru, Tegh Bahadur was beheaded by Mughal soldiers.

A walk down to the road will take you through a sea of banks. Above the bank buildings are some of the most impressive havelis. Sandwiched between Bank of Baroda and Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur is the most impressive of these: Lala Chunamal's haveli.



KASHMIRI GATE



A METRO STATION NEAR KASHMIRI GATE

Your next stop on the metro line, Kashmiri Gate, links the empires of the Mughal and the British. Before 1857, Kashmiri Gate area was the administrative centre of the East India Company and its Delhi resi- dents.

As you move out of Gate 1, you can see the Kashmiri Gate itself, with marks from cannons fired during the

1857 revolt still visible on the exteri- or. Walk or ride a rickshaw to the St. James Church (1836), built by Colonel Skinner, a Scottish merce- nary soldier. St. James' Church has an interesting layout - the classic cruciform, but with its but the seat- ing is under the central octagonal dome.



ST. JAMES' CHURCH

Close to the St. James Church is the Dara Shikoh Library, now the Archaeological Museum. Of interest is the remaining part of the British magazine blown up in 1857 on the road divider.

Taking the Boulevard Road exit at the Kashmiri Gate station brings you to the late Mughal gardens of Qudsia Bagh. Strolling among the trees and Mughal buildings of Qudsia Bagh is a peaceful break from the bustling city.

The ride on the metro to Civil Lines is distinct from the world it leaves behind. Colonial-style bungalows on Sham Nath Marg and the Oberoi Maidens (Now The Maidens) domi- nate the historical landscape here.

A rickshaw ride will take you to the beautiful tree-cover of the Ridge where you will find sites important to the 1857 Mutiny history: Flagstaff Tower and the Mutiny



THE MAIDENS

IN WINTERS, THE SOUND AND LIGHT SHOW AT THE RED FORT IS A DELIGHT TO WATCH - AS ARE THE MONUMENTS IN MOONLIGHT. RECORDED VOICES BELONG TO SUCH STALWARTS AS SHABANA AZMI, KABIR BEDI, ALYQUE PADAMSEE, OM PURI. THE MUSICAL SCORE FEATURES MAESTROS LIKE ALI AKBAR KHAN, USHA MANGESHKAR, AND MANNA DE. TAKE ALONG A SHAWI AS IT CAN GET A BIT NIPPY. SHOWS ARE IN HINDI AND ENGLISH (CHECK TIMINGS). TICKETS MAY BE BOUGHT ON LOCATION.



THE ASHOKA PILLAR ON THE RIDGE

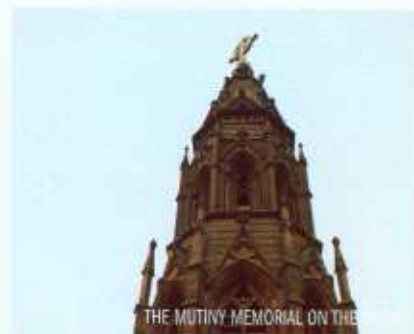
Memorial.

An Ashokan pillar from the 3rd century, brought from Meerut by Firoz Shah Tughlak, stands neglected next

to the Mutiny memorial. Your tour of Delhi via the metro ends here. If you're eager for one more look at Civil Lines and the Old City, you can catch the metro at Pul Bangash on the red line near the Mutiny Memorial. From here you'll have impressive aerial views of many



THE RIDGE



THE MUTINY MEMORIAL ON THE

SHAGUFTA BHARDWAJ IS A CULTURAL HISTORIAN, ADVISOR AND EDUCATOR. LEADS SUNDAY WALKS TO HERITAGE SITES FOR THE INDIA HABITAT CENTRE. CAN GENERALLY BE FOUND IN THE NARROWEST LANES LEADING TO THE OLDEST HAVELIS IN DELHI.

places you've just visited on foot. ■



WHAT YOU NEED TO GET STARTED

- MAP OF DELHI (EICHER) RS. 150
- RS. 70 METRO PASS (UNLIMITED TRAVEL FOR ONE WEEK) - THIS TOUR WILL NEED MORE THAN A DAY TO COMPLETE!
- COMFORTABLE WALKING SHOES, CAP, SUN GLASSES
- DUPATTA OR HEAD SCARF SO YOU CAN COVER YOUR HEAD IN MOSQUES AND GURUDWARA
- SECURE BAG WITH A SKETCHPAD/PENCILS, DRINKING WATER
- SMALL CHANGE FOR CYCLE RICKSHAWS

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GAZING AT Buddha

TEXT: RIKKI ASHER

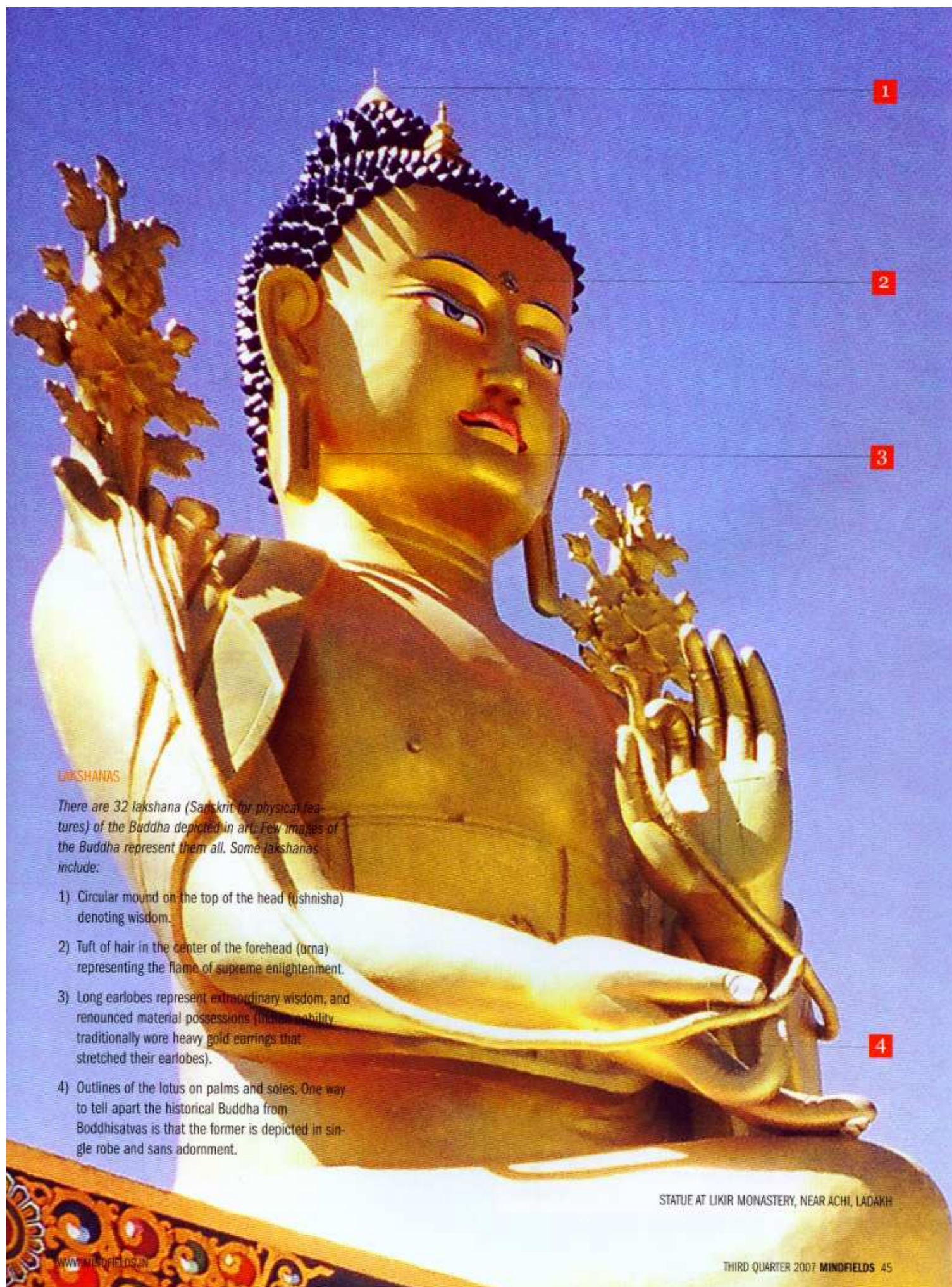
IMAGES: WIKIPEDIA, LENSCLTURE, LUKE HAOKIP

The term 'Buddhist Art' broadly refers to a gamut of figural statues of Buddha and his disciples; paintings on paper and cloth depicting scenes from the Buddha's life, and representations of the Mahayana Buddhist universe with its Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in peaceful and wrathful aspects; and articles of worship such as prayer wheels, incense holders, etc. These sacred objects were used as a focus for worship and meditation within religious settings. Smaller works were used for personal worship in homes and monasteries. Looking at a Buddhist image was meant to be a reminder of precepts by which one could direct the course of one's life and individual actions. Narrative scenes of the Buddha's life served as moral and ethical lessons for the conduct of one's life.

Most Buddhist art was portable



Even the paintings were designed to be rolled up in a scroll rather than be fixed on a flat, rigid surface. Portability was of essence - so that the objects and images could be carried far and wide by teachers, monks and pilgrims. It was an idea that obviously worked, if one were to study how far-reaching the impact of Buddhist imagery has been - from its humble beginnings in Central India, to the magnificent temples and statues of Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Japan. Buddhism evolved and adapted to the various cultures it encountered - its imagery followed suit. The art was deeply influenced by local artistic styles, available materials, and aesthetic sensibilities of the region, even as it retained its basic principles.



LAKSHANAS

There are 32 lakshana (Sanskrit for physical features) of the Buddha depicted in art. Few images of the Buddha represent them all. Some lakshanas include:

- 1) Circular mound on the top of the head (ushnisha) denoting wisdom.
- 2) Tuft of hair in the center of the forehead (urna) representing the flame of supreme enlightenment.
- 3) Long earlobes represent extraordinary wisdom, and renounced material possessions (monks traditionally wore heavy gold earrings that stretched their earlobes).
- 4) Outlines of the lotus on palms and soles. One way to tell apart the historical Buddha from Bodhisatvas is that the former is depicted in single robe and sans adornment.

STATUE AT LIKIR MONASTERY, NEAR ACHI, LADAKH



Early Buddhist art had no Buddha in it.

In fact, for the first few centuries after the death of the Buddha - there was no Buddhist art. Representations of the Buddha did not appear until around the first century BC. Until then, the Buddha and his teachings were depicted in art in a non-figurative way - by images of the wheel (dharma chakra), footprints, empty thrones and other symbols of his teachings.

Around third century BC, Emperor Ashoka sponsored edict pillars to be built at sites of Buddhist pilgrimages; and also commissioned 84,000 stupas, or burial mounds built that contained relics of the Buddha. For centuries, artists followed strict rules for representing the Buddha. These rules were listed in great detail in Hindu and Buddhist painting manuals with specific body proportions, and conventions for facial features. These rules were followed by Buddhists all over Asia - with some regional adaptations in the imagery of Tibet and China (see images above).

Gestures speak louder than (written) words

The role of standardized iconography is to convey information to people who may not know how to read the local language. Understand pictographs is far less esoteric than learning the symbols and sounds of a spoken language. For example, a circle of children holding hands would be recognized the world over as a symbol of unity.

In studying art from another era and location, sometimes one may not be able to immediately 'decode' its iconography. It is important to remember that the same art was "understood" by people of that time. It's just that the signs, symbols and conventions prevalent then are not easily understood today.

One can understand the ideas communicated and decipher meanings by exploring the work of art contextually. To comprehend Buddhist art, too, one must have a basic familiarity with the content and function of symbols used.

Body language is a familiar idea in contemporary psychology. You can gauge peoples' mental state by scanning their posture or expressions. Eyes, facial features, and hands can all be very eloquent. Hand gestures as representatives of language have appeared throughout world cultures - Egyptian hieroglyphs, early Christian art, Native American traditions, symbolic hand clasps of secret organizations.

They play a vital role in Hindu and Buddhist art as well. The Sanskrit term *mudra* refers to symbolic gesture of the hands. These were widely used in images of the Buddha. Understanding some of these *mudras* can make viewing Asian iconography a particularly enriching experience. ■

SOME MUDRAS IN BUDDHIST SCULPTURE



a) DHYANA (MEDITATION) b) BHUMI SPARSHA (TOUCHING THE GROUND)
c) DHARMA CHAKRA PRAVARTANA (TURNING OF THE WHEEL OF LAW)
d) ABHAYA (PROTECTION) e) VARADA (BESTOWMENT) f) VITARKA (DISCOURSE)
Images courtesy www.lensculture.com

MUDRA

activity

Visual information is an essential component of the world today. Mudra study can serve to convey meaning in classrooms by encouraging students to decipher visual codes, signs, and symbols as thoughtful and informed ways of finding, commonalities and multiple meanings, through dialogue, observation and art making.

The use of these *mudras* is also prevalent in some dance forms of India and South East Asia. And their 'code' is pretty much the same as that in Hindu and Buddhist statues! Most museums and private collections in Indian cities have Buddhist sculpture or replicas from Mathura, Gandhara, Nepal, Tibet - making this an easy activity to facilitate for Grades 4-7. It can be an interdisciplinary activity for History and Art. Recommended duration - 3 sessions.

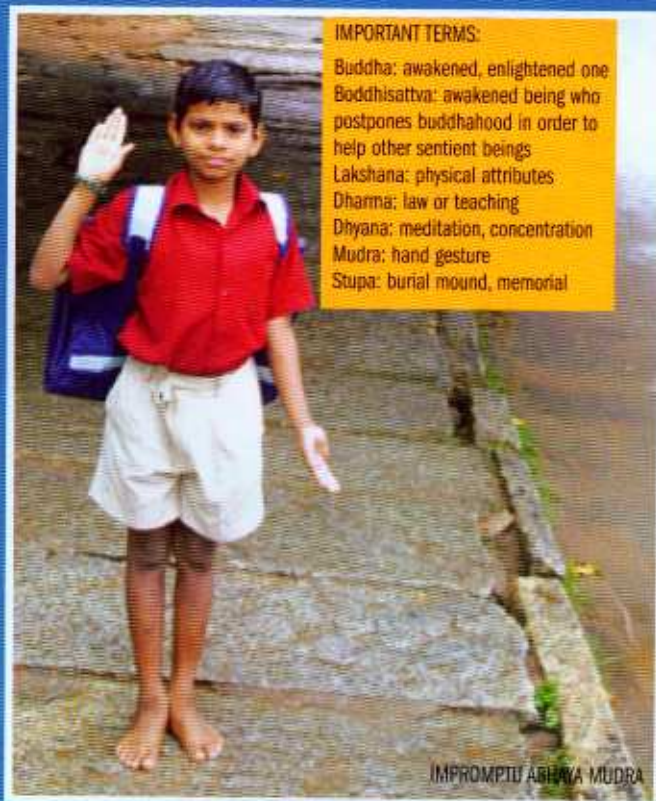
PART I: PRE-MUSEUM TRIP ACTIVITY IN CLASS

Discussions could include hand gesture codes used by traffic policemen, sign language for the hearing impaired, and the direct relationship of mudras with Indian dance forms such as *Bharatnatyam*. Students have their own vocabulary of hand gestures that can be used as motivation to understand Buddhist art.

- Students can create meaning in their own work by using symbols and metaphor. Ask students to form a circle. One at a time, use hand signals only to communicate a greeting. Follow this by an emotion, or a theme, i.e. anger, surprise, boredom.
- Show students examples of mudras in Buddhist sculpture or painting. Ask them to identify the messages they notice.
- Introduce meanings of Mudras*
- Introduce gesture drawing using 2B pencil and drawing paper. Ask students to draw their own hand posed to express a personal message.
- Display drawings, discuss problems and surprises.

PART II: ACTIVITY IN THE MUSEUM

- In front of a selected Buddhist sculpture or painting ask the class observe the piece for a few minutes. Follow up with a discussion about the work. Here are some suggestions for discussing the works:
 - What is going on in this work of art?
 - What in the piece makes you say that?
 - What is the form? Discuss line, color, shape, pattern, texture.
 - What materials are used? How can you tell?
 - When and where were the works created?
 - How can you tell or find out?



IMPORTANT TERMS:

Buddha: awakened, enlightened one
 Bodhisattva: awakened being who postpones buddhahood in order to help other sentient beings
 Lakshana: physical attributes
 Dharma: law or teaching
 Dhyana: meditation, concentration
 Mudra: hand gesture
 Stupa: burial mound, memorial

IMPROMPTU ASHWA MUDRA

- What body parts are used to express something? What is being expressed to you? What does it remind you of in your own experience?
- What else would you like to know about this piece? How could you find out?

PART III: FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY IN CLASS

The class can follow up with a drawing of the hands in the piece.

- Review illustrated examples of mudras in Buddhist sculpture or painting from the museum visit.
- In groups of three, ask the class to describe the difference between seeing a reproduction and the actual work of art. Have one group member report to the large group.
- Display students' museum drawings. Discuss them.
- Using drawing paper and 2B pencils, introduce the class to contour drawing. With partners, students can compose a list of five hand gestures used to express a theme of their choice. Ask students to choose three of the five and draw three different contour drawings of their hand in those positions.
- Display drawings and discuss what the class notices and describe how the museum experience influenced them.

RIKKI ASHER WAS INTRODUCED TO CH'AN (ZEN) MEDITATION METHODS AND YOGA PRACTICE IN 1979. MEDITATION AND YOGA TECHNIQUES TEND TO FIND THEIR WAY INTO HER QUEENS COLLEGE CLASSES FOR ART EDUCATION TRAINING, WORK WITH INNER-CITY TEENAGERS, AND VARIOUS ADULT AND SENIOR ADULT GROUPS. SHE IS AN AESTHETIC EDUCATION CONSULTANT, PAINTER AND PRINTMAKER. RIKKI LIVES IN NEW YORK CITY WITH HER HUSBAND AND CAT.

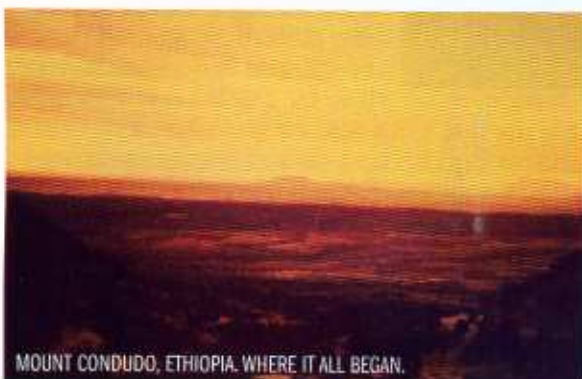
OUTDOOR EDUCATION



JEAN AUDREY THOMAS INTREPID TRAVELLER

INTERVIEW: AMRUTA PATIL PHOTOS: LUKE HAKIP, JEAN'S COLLECTION

The first thing I notice is how frequently Jean Thomas uses the word 'challenge'. She does not use a digital camera, for example, because she sees it as being "less challenging", she will take on the trail in Western Nepal she could not complete last time round because "it's a challenge". The other thing I notice is the jigsaw puzzle pieces all over her house. On the kitchen table. In the sheets. Wedged within a book as a placemaker. Peculiarly appropriate. The only way to know Jean is to piece her together, story by unassuming story.



MOUNT CONDUDO, ETHIOPIA. WHERE IT ALL BEGAN.

HOW DID THE GIRL FROM ST. MARY'S RAMNEE TURN INTO A MOUNTAIN SPRITE?

As a eighteen year old newly wed, I accompanied Matthew to Ethiopia (they were helping set up a military academy there) in 1957. They were four years of great exploring - I spent many a day on horseback. From my room, I could see a mountain on the horizon. Mount Condudo - legend had it that there were magical wild horses there. It really fascinated me, and one morning, I told Matthew that I had to climb it. He surprised me by planning a climbing excursion to Mount Condudo. I hadn't ever climbed before. It was beautiful, but very very hard. I have travelled in harder terrain since, but Condudo was the first, and therefore one of the most memorable experiences.

We returned to India. There were to be no mountains for me for some years, but the love for mountain trails had been sown. It was only a matter of time...

THEN ON, UNTIL YOU WERE 45 YEARS OLD, WERE THE FAMILY YEARS...

Sunanda, my eldest daughter, was born shortly after we got back to India, then Gitanjali, then Samantha. The Indian Army made sure that Matthew was hardly ever at home, we lived for most part of 15 years, and we spent together whatever time we could manage.

So it was an all-girl household for most part of their (and my) growing up. I did the whole army wife routine - Army Wives Welfare Association work, the Diwalis and Christmases, and interactions with the families of *jawans*.

WERE YOU A DISCIPLINARIAN MOM?

You could say I was hard on my daughters. They had everything, but they weren't indulged. I taught them to bicycle and swim, they wore what I stitched, they were taught to deal with whatever hardship came along. Even now, I know my daughters can survive anything.

They were raised Roman Catholic - church every Sunday, regardless of where we were posted. I think it's important that children have some sort of anchor when they are young. They can do whatever they want with it when they grow up. My own interest in Mahayana Buddhism has grown over the years... I find many parallels between Christianity and Buddhism.

DID YOU RESENT THE FACT THAT YOU WEREN'T IN THE OUTDOORS AS MUCH AS YOU WOULD LIKE?

It was hard work, but we never grumbled. I think we were happy with our lot in those days. Also, you must remember that Army life is interesting and unconventional even for the wives - we stayed in all kinds of places, all kinds of accommodation. One of our homes had the bedrooms in one place, and a kitchen at the bottom of a hill. I've bathed the babies in a bucket. We have even lived in a tent when Sunanda was a baby. When I stepped out, I'd tie her ankle to the tent pole so she wouldn't wander off. *(Laughs)* When I returned, she'd have wrapped herself around the tent pole!

IN 1980 CAME THE CHANGE...

I got a call from Col Balwant Sandhu, principal of the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (Dehradun), inviting me to come along as a guest instructor. I had no professional expertise, remember, and I told him that. His response was that I should remedy that! I underwent training, and taught the Basic and Advanced Womens Mountaineering course at NIM.

It was a rigorous course, and I was their first female instructor. The years at NIM were a time of consolidation for me as a mountaineering professional, but after four years of teaching, I knew that I wanted to do something more. Like walk the Himalayan ranges from East to West. It was time to go solo.

YOU TRAVEL SOLO MOST OF THE TIME...

People treat hiking as some kind of a leisurely holiday...get up when you want, leave when you want, walk inconsistent distances everyday. Most people lack the discipline of waking up at the crack of dawn, walking regardless of cold or discomfort. Unless there is a close match in sensibility between travel companions - traveling together can be stressful.

I have two friends who I hike with though - Helga Sandhu with whom I walked in Nepal, and Jasjeet Mansingh (both in their 60's) with whom I have done the Lhasa-Samye stretch and the Kailash-Mansarovar one. Jasjeet and I also share a love for ornithology.



YOUR LOVE FOR FLORA AND FAUNA HAS BEEN AN ENDURING ONE. YOU HAVE A BEAUTIFUL GARDEN, WITH HALF A DOZEN BUSY BIRDFEEDERS. YOU HAVE ALSO HAD SOME UNUSUAL PETS IN THE PAST...

(Laughs) Yes, there was a deer called Willy and a monkey called Pedro. We have two dogs at home now. And any number of wild birds that stop by in the garden - far fewer than they used to be...birds are just disappearing. *(Jean has been chronicling the bird visitors in her garden for the last 20 years. She knows the change in their habits, and migratory patterns).* I document trees and birds when I travel. There is always a pair of binoculars and bird identification guide handy. And I bring back saplings from everywhere...



JEAN (EXTREME LEFT) WITH FAMILY AT HEMKUNT SAHIB

THE SUPPORT OF FAMILY...

The girls had grown up by the time I started mountaineering in earnest, so it wasn't as if I abdicated responsibility. Matthew was very supportive. Our motto in life has always been "Do what makes you most happy".

In the years that he was in the army, growing in responsibility and stature, I did not ask him to alter his course for me. I knew that he *had* to do what he was doing, and I supported him. Which is why when I wanted to do something I loved - he understood, and reciprocated the support. Besides, as an infantryman, Matthew knows what it is like to love the outdoors.

THERE ARE DRIED FLOWERS IN YOUR JOURNAL...AND MAPS AND LONG DESCRIPTIONS OF PLACES AND TREES...

You have to remember that I have the luxury of time. I can take off for 6 weeks, 8 weeks...I don't have to rush back to anything. That gives the opportunity to look, listen, absorb, take detours. I call it my S-O-L-O time. That's Solitude, Observe, Listen, Oxygenize. *(Laughs)* Each time I stop somewhere for the night, or take a tea break, I take my journal out and write. It's important to get the names of places in right, they are easy to mix up. You have to record it while the memory is fresh.

WHAT GUIDEBOOKS DO YOU FOLLOW?

The usual Lonely Planet kind of guides are not detailed enough for a serious trekker. They mark important destinations, but miss out smaller villages in between. I think the best-written guidebook for trekking in Nepal is Stephen Bezruchka's 'Trekking in Nepal' (ISBN 0898862795). He writes in great detail - you really rely on that when you are out in deserted places, you know.

There was *one* instance where I really cursed Bezruchka for being careless about detail, though.

It was almost dusk, light was disappearing fast. I reached a stream where, according to the guidebook, there was supposed to be a bridge. My plan had been to cross the bridge, go a distance, then halt for the night. And what

happened was - I got there - there was this furiously flowing river. And there was no bridge!

You can't imagine how that felt like. It was like being betrayed by someone you've entrusted your life to. I was so angry, I did something very reckless - waded right across the stream to the other side. It was a forceful river, I could have drowned, but I did it. Still mad at the author of the book, I drafted a letter right there, by torchlight. And I sent it to him when I got back home. He was sweet enough to reply and apologize. *(Laughs)*

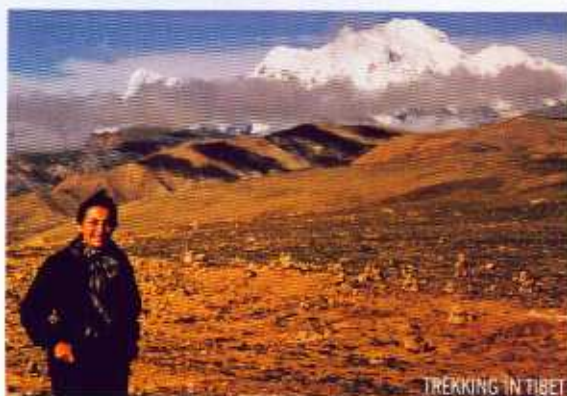
The other thing I like to do is follow routes taken by explorers in the late 1870's. I have a collection of rare old books written by mountaineers - Their routes are off the beaten track and very interesting to follow *(see Jean's account of the Srinagar-Leh journey)*.

HOW USEFUL ARE MAPS MADE THAT LONG AGO? DON'T MOUNTAINS HAVE A WAY OF CLOSING OLD PATHS AND CHANGING THEIR LANDSCAPE?

They do, sometimes, yes. A pass might get blocked, a river might alter course, or disappear - but the mountains don't move so easily. And you follow the mountains.

WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE TO MEET OTHER TRAVELERS ON THE TRAIL?

It feels wonderful! *(Laughs)* Actually it depends on where you are. Season time on the



TREKKING IN TIBET

Annapurna circuit, you meet 500 people going up and coming down - then you don't miss human company much! Other times, like on my way to Gokyo lake, I met just one other person in one entire month. Of course, it's not complete isolation. You interact with locals for provisions, sometimes there's a porter with you...

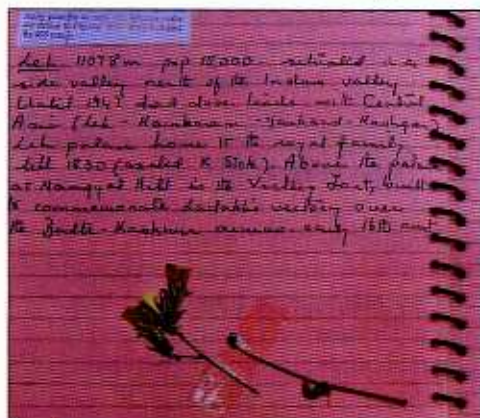
SAFETY IS A BIG CONCERN FOR WOMEN MOUNTAINEERS...

There are quite a few women climbers out there. But things have changed. They warn you not to travel alone these days...I don't go anywhere without doing my homework. I study the routes, culture, political developments of the region. But over and above these precautions, safety is about attitude. The way you conduct yourself, the way you deal with situations that could be risky, the way you interact

with people. Your attitude makes you vulnerable or strong.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING NEXT, JEAN?

Western Nepal towards the Crystal Mountain. This is the area where Peter Matthiessen found his snow leopards. Amazingly rugged terrain pockmarked by Maoist hideouts. I had been there some years back on a six week trek with Helga. We had to pull out because we ran out of food. It was an unknown area and we realized that we weren't going to get any support from the local villagers because they were so poor themselves. We survived on stinging nettle, docleaf, potato, and sattu all the way back. It's a big, tough one, a long haul - you need the food supply. I want to go back and complete it. And this time round, I will be prepared. ■



EXCERPTS FROM JEAN'S SRINAGAR-LEH JOURNAL

nel. Walk to the Titanic Point - our first view of the Srinagar Valley. Rice fields ripening, the yellow green looks like a huge patchwork quilt. Night halt at Rawalpuri.

7th Sept: Left early the next morning for Sonamarg. Traveled

through Gandarbal, so different now to what Frederic Drew passed through. Plain he talks about is overloaded with houses, shops, markets. Only the mountain looks the same. On to Kangan, crossing the Sindh river. Willow trees line the river, the road is through glades of fruit and walnut trees. Onto the open valley of Sonamarg, a carpet of green.

9th Sept: A 6.32 km stretch to Zorzila Pass, sandwich breakfast at Leh Gate at 9:00 am. Onward to Ghumri.

10th Sept: Start our day at 6:00 am under a starry and moonlit sky, towards the village of Matayan - highest village in Ladakh, Pass Dhruvpath Kund, reach the valley and town of Drass. Around us, the peaks of Toto ling, Tiger Hill and others - witnesses to the Kargil war.

11th Sept: Pass Bhimbal, Chokhial,

and the strongly flowing Drass river. Then Dandathang, Jasmath, Sunalthang and Thasgam - our night's halt. Kilometers passes pleasantly under our feet.

12th Sept: Comfortable start. Thasgam village has 25 houses - no one is stirring at 6 am. Mountains tower above us. How did they get denuded? Kharbu - breakfast stop! Bridge across to Kaksha, then Channikun where rivers Indus and Drass meet - one muddy, the other crystal clear. Green apricots, willow, fields of corn en route. Been a long day.

13th Sept: Detour to Batalik today. Cross the Lalungla pass, height 13,200 feet.

15th Sept: Paskim, then Lotsum. Shargol - our night's halt - has a Buddhist cave monastery perched like an eagle's eyrie on the side of a sheer rock face. Saw the Mulbeck Chamba, 8m high rock carving of Buddha, dating back 700 years.

16th Sept: Climb 2000 feet, walk 14 km to the top of Nimika La (3760 m). Buddhist prayer flags and katas strung across the road. Descent to Chanrak, tea halt at Khangral. Beautiful. Visited Sang Sang Chosling monastery - where Milarepa is said to have stayed.

17th Sept: Across the Fotu La, 4147m, via Heneskut, night halt at Lamayanu - earliest surviving monastery of Ladakh. Visited cave in which Yogi Naropa is said to have meditated.

18th Sept: To Khaltoe. Chose the higher, longer route that passes through 'moonland'. Then the Jelabee bends - drop of 1200 metres! Cross the Wangla river. Light breeze gone, now it's all UV, dehydrate, burn. Khaltoe has a Punjabi Dhaba!

19th Sept: Make good time to Nuria. Smells of freshly baked bread. Then Ridyong monastery, Saspol. Stay at the Aichi Guest House.

20th Sept: Much to explore in Aichi, 25 m high golden statue of Maitreya at Likir.

21st Sept: To Basgo and Nimmu - via Saspol. Earth is firm and crisp, fresh snowlike crunch to it. Turn off to Nye. Spot a red fox. Basgo, old capital of lower Ladakh, has a 400 year old gompa. Zaskar and Indus converge near Nimmu.

23rd Sept: Gurudwara Pathar Sahib - loud music and langar. The Phayang. Leh is buried in buildings and Tarmac. I wonder what Sir Frederic Drew would have said. ■

"We are going away again, this time to Central Asia, where, if anywhere upon earth, wisdom is to be found, and we anticipate that our journey will be a long one." H Rider - Haggard

On my 60th birthday in 1997, I celebrated by walking to the Karakoram Pass. 10 years later on, I'm celebrating by walking 450 km from Srinagar to Leh. No birthday cakes for me! The route was the one taken by Sir Frederic Drew in 1875.

Group of six, whittles down to two. Small landslides along the way. Onward journey delayed by rains. Visit Krimachi - 8th-9th century temples - soaring up towards the blue sky, silent and somewhat forgotten.

Pass through Patni Top, Ramban, to the transit camp short of the Banihal Tunnel. Drive to the 2543 meter tun-



TEACHERS WHO TEACH, NOT TELL

AN INDOMITABLE SPIRIT

INTERVIEW: MINDFIELDS TEAM PHOTO: STUDIO UMBILICAL

At 86+, SK Saxena has strong opinions, is cued-in, deeply empathetic, and fiercely independent. He has been a prominent Socialist Party worker, educator, founder of a school for the blind, and has a friend circle ranging from 17 to 90 years.

We spent two days with him for an interview for what was meant to be a short interview. Along the way, we talked about MK Gandhi and Baba Amte, the Independence struggle, childhood and dreaming, recipe for hummus, primary education, and keeping age in perspective.

BACKGROUND AND INFLUENCES

I was born and brought up in Delhi. Studied at Sir Harcourt Butler High School. Did an MA in History from Hindu College. I studied Urdu/Persian until Grade 8, and my love for the language and for Islamic culture has remained. Indian culture is so indebted to Iran!

I was a RAF trainee pilot, but was given the marching orders because of my involvement in the Independence movement! I became part of the Praja Socialist party working committee and remained part of it for the next 15 years. In 1971 I got a Diploma in

Special Education for problem children from the UK.
ON CHOOSING EDUCATION AS A CAREER...

A defining moment in my life was coming across Gandhi's words "Give me 50,000 teachers and I will change the face of India." And so the decision was made.

ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS YOU DID WAS SET UP A SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND NEAR DELHI...

Yes, in Tughlaqabad, 1952. We started off with about 14 kids and 4 teachers. It had a slightly hiccupy start - with the locals Gujjars being very suspicious of us. They thought we were Christian missionaries trying to convert them. Then there was the other issue about enrollment - we had to catch blind people and persuade them to enroll! It turned out alright though - the school even had its own orchestra, and students did the gardening on campus.

ON THE MOST CRUCIAL YEARS OF A CHILD'S LIFE...

Give them a secure, nurtured life until they are seven years old, and children can take on the world after that. Everyone acknowledges that these are the key developmental years - and yet, ironically, the best

teaching talent migrates to the senior classes, and the substandard teachers are relegated to the youngest children.

ON TEACHING TECHNIQUES...

We should allow children to be dreamers – but everything about the way we interact with them forbids that. All we do is give sermons in class – parents and teachers, everyone knows the Ultimate Truth, the child only needs to sit and listen!

Teaching needs to be hands on. Abstractions need to be explained properly. Just saying “Two plus two equals four” is not enough. Two pebbles plus two elephants is not equal to four pebbles!

Children should note down what they feel they need to record, rather than what the teacher wants them to fill up books with.

ON COMPETITION...

What competition does not do, is foster co operation. While playing team sports, for example, it is important for children of different levels of skill and temperament to play together – so that they learn to accommodate, co-operate... and tolerate.

ON WORKING WITH TROUBLED CHILDREN...

In my 18 years in London, I taught and counseled children from the most needy, troubled backgrounds. They were children of immigrants, of broken homes, of families where English was not even the second language.

The usual rules – of detention, of strong-arming troublesome children into submission – would not work with them. When your dad is an alcoholic, your parents are always fighting, and the house is not heated well enough, staying back in school for ‘detention’ is a welcome thought. I needed to reach out to them on a personal level before I attempted to get them interested in what I taught in class.

I’d “punish” them by interrogating them about their life and the country they came from, instead. That gave me an insight into their minds. If a child is fidgety and distracted, instead of making him write an imposition, check if he has lice in his hair – he may have had a restless night because of that.

ON THE ROLE OF TEACHERS...

You need to be resourceful as a teacher. And you need to constantly have the child’s best interest in mind.

Children today are more needy of a good teacher than ever before – because there is such a shortage of attentive adults in their lives. This is the Key-ring Generation...who wear the house key around their neck and let themselves into an empty house after school. Forget about uncles and grand aunts and cousins, not even their parents are around.

LESSONS LEARNT AS AN EDUCATOR...

Realize the importance of the individual.

A little girl I know was looking for “her leaf” on a ground covered with leaves. She was distraught because someone had given her the leaf, and she had misplaced it. The individuality of that leaf was obvious and important to the girl. It was an eye-opening moment for me.

Don’t take yourself too seriously.

Back in my day, we had to wear a black gown when we went in to teach. The kids used to crack up because we looked like Batman or something. If you don’t think there is anything about you that is going to make them laugh – think again. Better to share the joke with them!

Question everything.

There is no need to explain this one.

ON CALVIN AND HOBBS, DENNIS THE MENACE, GANDHI AND TAGORE

The comic strips are the first thing I read in the papers every morning. They can teach you more than some of these big books on child psychology. Even Winnie the Pooh – he isn’t the sharpest tack in the

box but there is so much to learn from his interactions! Other essential readings are the works of MK Gandhi and Tagore.

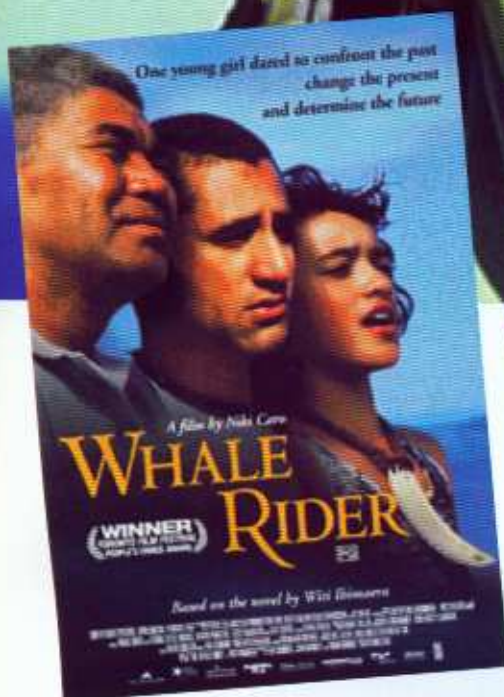
ON DEALING WITH THE GENERATION GAP...

Most of my friends are several decades younger than I am. I don’t feel the generation gap because I don’t feel my age. The only thing that reminds me of my age is my body – the loss of hearing and the slowing down of limbs. The company of young people is good because they are so hopeful. Most people my age are either dead, or have given up.

ON WHAT LIES AHEAD...

It has been a good life. I have been very lucky with friends, and in my relationships with my sons. I swim everyday, attend seminars and programs in town. The local bookshop here gets me the books I want to read (currently, SK is reading Hosseini’s ‘A Thousand Splendid Suns’ and Dalrymple’s ‘The Last Mughal’)

IRONICALLY, THE BEST TEACHING TALENT MIGRATES TO THE SENIOR CLASSES, AND THE SUBSTANDARD TEACHERS ARE RELEGATED TO THE YOUNGEST CHILDREN.



Whale Rider is a heartwarming and inspiring tale of a young girl making place for herself in a gender divided, traditional society.

WHALE RIDER

TEXT: MOHINISH SHUKLA

- (1) While breaching, about 90% of a Right Whale's body leaves the surface of the water. To do so, it needs to be traveling at a speed of about 30 kmph, and is one of the most powerful acts for the whale.
- (2) Of the couple of thousand known cultures, all are male dominated.

It's the kind of film where telling the story takes none of the magic away. The strength of Niki Caro's beautiful film *Whale Rider* (2002) is in the strength of characters she portrays. This is the story of Paikea, a young girl from a Maori community in modern day New Zealand. Her mother and twin brother die soon after childbirth. For Paikea's grandfather, Koro, the loss of the boy is compounded by the shattering of his dream of raising his grandson as the next chief of their Maori tribe.

Through Paikea, we can identify with our childhood, when we first discovered the conflict between ourselves and our society. In Paikea's Koro, we find the

stubbornness of the elder Guardians of the Culture. Koro decides to set up a special school to educate the youth of the community in the ways of their tribe, and to select a new leader. But, the school is only for boys, and Paikea is told to leave. Still, she sneaks up and tries to learn what the boys are being taught. Her uncle secretly coaches her on using the *taiaha*, the fighting stick.

Koro's refusal to include Paikea in the school evoked in me the same sense of outrage when children anywhere are denied basic education because of their gender or their social background. Like in so many cultures, the girl child is not welcome in the family. As the scenes of the infant Paikea transition into the present of the film, Paikea narrates, "My Koro wished I'd never been born. But then he changed his mind."

And there is a great deal of affection. Koro takes Paikea to school and back everyday. Paikea herself nominates Koro as her guest of honour at her school function. So why is there a conflict? Why do the elders cling so stubbornly to tradition? One possibility is that the *reasons* for the traditions have been lost. For example, Koro throws a whale tooth into the ocean for the boys to find – the finder is supposed to be a leader. But, will any tooth do? Does it have to be a tooth? Does it have to come from a whale? It is almost impossible to separate a causal *requirement* from a historical *accident*. So, the safest course seems to be to keep all aspects of the tradition intact.

The film carefully explores the inevitable conflicts when traditions cannot be maintained. What will happen to the tribe if the next male head cannot be chosen? Koro does not know. He does not know how change will affect the balance of everything. Although he clearly loves Paikea, she is incompatible with the tradition of a male leader. When Paikea is leaving for Germany with her father, who promotes Maori art in Europe, Koro goes into the house with scarcely a word. But, then he is seen standing at the window watching her leave.

Paikea herself is not a rebel, and she has no cause. She is just a twelve-year-old girl who wants to explore the world around her. She does not quite understand why her gender is quite such a cause for conflicts. She cannot see why her practicing *taiaha* can jeopardize the future of the tribe. Yet, the film shows her deep sensitivity in trying to make things right. When Koro turns somber and listless about not finding a future chief of the tribe, she sings to the whales to ask them for their aid. And the whales listen to her, and come to the shore, only to be beached.



WHALE RIDER WAS AWARDED THE 2003 BAFTA CHILDREN'S AWARD, THE 2004 CHILDREN'S JURY AWARD OF THE CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, THE 2004 INDEPENDENT SPIRITS AWARD, AND AWARDS AT THE 2002 TORONTO FESTIVAL, THE 2003 SAO PAULO FESTIVAL AND THE 2003 SUNDANCE FESTIVAL, AMONGST OTHERS.

KEISHA CASTLE-HUGHES (BORN IN 1990, DONNYBROOK, AUSTRALIA) WAS NOMINATED FOR AN OSCAR AS BEST ACTRESS IN A LEADING ROLE FOR HER ROLE AS PAIKEA IN JANUARY 2004. THIS MADE HER THE YOUNGEST PERSON TO BE NOMINATED IN THAT CATEGORY. SHE HAS ALSO STARRED IN STAR WARS III: THE REVENGE OF THE SITH (2005) AS THE QUEEN OF NABOO, AND IN THE NATIVITY STORY (2006) AS MARY.

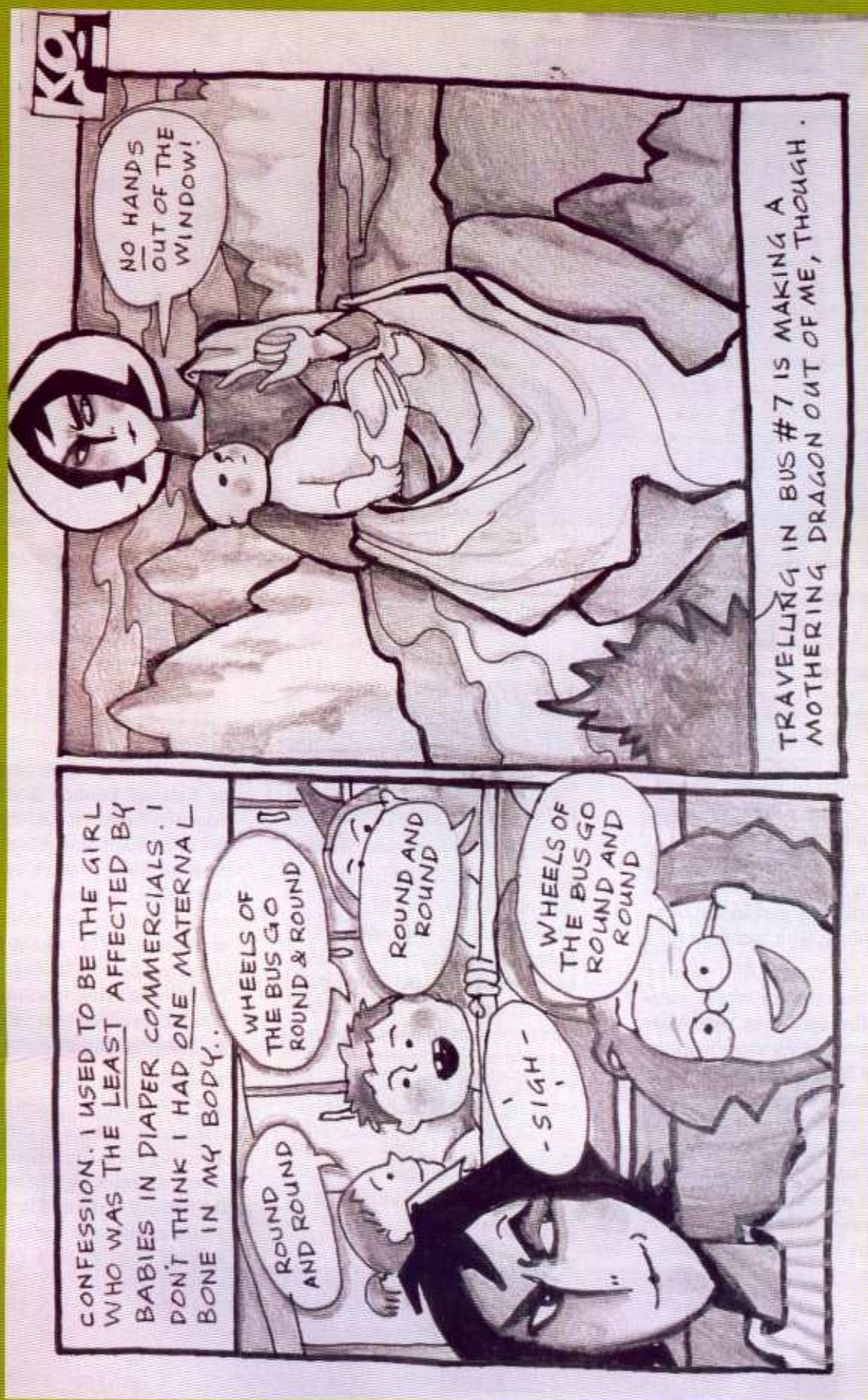
NIKI CARO, THE DIRECTOR OF WHALE RIDER (BORN IN 1989 IN WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND) WROTE THE SCRIPT FOR WHALE RIDER, BASED ON A BOOK BY WITI IHIMAERA, A PROMINENT MAORI WRITER. CURRENTLY, SHE IS WORKING ON ANOTHER FILM, 'THE VINTNER'S LUCK', ALSO STARRING KEISHA CASTLE-HUGHES.

The story is a modern day fable in its development and in how it ends. Keeping the end spoiler-free, suffice it to say that the end sees Koro's dream fulfilled. The end comes as a burst of insight and relief for Koro, who finds a resolution to all his dilemmas.

The film has some great camerawork, aided by the generous lushness of the New Zealand land and seascapes. Ancillary characters like Paikea's fellow students, her uncle and the uncle's fiancée fill in the canvas with a rich background texture. The music is a mixed bag, reflecting the old-meets-new theme of the film. The Maori music and chanting provides a haunting acoustic window into a raw and mythical world.

The film created a singular, metaphorical picture in my mind – like a breaching whale, the force of Paikea's character seemed to take her clear of the strictures of her male-dominated society. ■

MOHINISH STARTED OFF LOOKING AT MICROBES AND WRITING PROGRAMS. HAS SINCE BEEN INTERESTED IN HOW YEAST CELLS RESPOND TO STRESS, HOW RAT TESTES PACK DNA INTO SPERMS, HOW FORESTS ARE STRUCTURED, HOW WE HEAR FLUENT SPEECH AS A SERIES OF WORDS. LOVES COOKING, VIDEO GAMES, SCIENCE FICTION AND PG WODEHOUSE. YOU CAN READ HIS WRITING AT [HTTP://MOHINISH.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://MOHINISH.BLOGSPOT.COM)



NEWSBYTES

ONE IN EVERY TWO STUDENTS DROP OUT OF SCHOOL IN INDIA

Even as India is increasingly being recognised internationally as a knowledge hub, only 10 percent of its total student strength is enrolled in higher education. According to the revealing study carried out by the human resource development (HRD) ministry, one out of every two students enrolled in schools drop out before reaching ninth standard, one out of every four students does not go beyond class five.

SCHOOL CHILDREN GEAR UP TO 'CLEAN UP THE WORLD'

NEW DELHI

The annual "Clean Up The World" campaign that has become an important activity on the calendar of several schools in the Capital will be launched at Guru Harkishan Public School, Vasant Vihar. Over 500 students from schools across Delhi will take part in the campaign along with members of NGOs.

The "Clean Up The World" campaign first started in 1989 when an Australian yachtsman and-builder Ian Kiernan, appalled by the amount of rubbish he came across while sailing, organised a clean-up of the Sydney Harbour, during which over 40,000 volunteers removed rusted car bodies, plastic, glass bottles and cigarette butts from the water.

The campaign went global in 1993, with Sydney becoming

"Clean Up The World" headquarters. Now it brings together hundreds of people from around the world.

TEACHING STUDENTS ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

NEW DELHI:

Giving college students of the Capital a lesson or two about human rights, Amnesty International, India, has as a prelude to mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights next year started a unique campaign in the city called the "Kabuliwallah Express".

The festival's theme is 'voices of dignity' and will address the right to life with dignity via art, education and entertainment, the festival will take up issues of right to life with dignity.

From September to December, the International Week of Justice Caravan will visit campuses in Delhi carrying 'Kahani Kabuliwallah Ki', that comprises theatre, exhibition, films, talks, signature campaigns, competitions on music, theatre, screen-writing, short film, photography, painting, posters and caricatures and an educational module on media and justice.

STATE SILENT ABOUT CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

ANDHRA PRADESH:

Terming corporal punishment as a 'non-negotiable' issue, Chairperson of National

Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) Shanta Sinha felt that no one should attempt to legitimise punishment by saying that they were just trying to control errant students in a classroom.

Sinha said that the responsibility to protect children from punishment lies with teachers, Education Department and management of schools. All forms of punishment are fundamental breach of human rights, Ms. Sinha maintained.

Over 300 Government teachers who participated in the meeting pledged to use understanding rather than intimidation in the classroom.

TRIBAL STUDENTS FACE PREJUDICE IN CLASSROOMS

According to a report prepared by National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), Dalit and adivasi children are discriminated against in schools, and used as "servants" by their own 'high caste' teachers, some of whom, like some teachers in Madhya Pradesh, felt that teaching "Korku" children was equivalent to "teaching cattle".

The levels of prejudice, hostility and indifference towards the children is so high that it is affecting their education. The report assumes significance as the literacy level of STs is 47.1% against the national average of 64.84 % ■

GLOSSARY



ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER (ADD)

A syndrome of disordered learning and disruptive behavior that is not caused by any serious underlying physical or mental disorder and that has several subtypes characterized primarily by symptoms of inattentiveness or primarily by symptoms of hyperactivity and impulsive behavior or by the significant expression of all three; called also minimal brain dysfunction

GELUGPA

The Gelugpa ('virtuous ones') is a school ('-pa') of Tibetan Buddhism that emerged in the fourteenth century. It was founded by Tsongkhapa who was renowned for both his scholasticism and his virtue. Followers of the Gelug school are also sometimes referred to as 'the yellow hats'.

NATIONAL OPEN SCHOOL (NOS)

A national body engaged in distance and open learning at school level. (www.nos.org)

NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK (NCF)

A curriculum framework which will indicate to those engaged in writing new school textbooks, the guidelines within which they will have to work. It will also act as a document which embodies the new vision of school education that will inform educational practice for the next five years. Read more about it on the NCERT website - <http://ncert.nic.in>

OBESITY

A condition that is characterized by excessive accumulation and storage of fat in the body and that in an adult is typically indicated by a body mass index of 30 or greater

ORIGAMI

The art or process, originating in Japan, of folding paper into shapes representing flowers and birds, for example. [Japanese : ori, to fold + kami, paper.] Also refers to a decorative object made by folding paper.

ORNITHOLOGY

Branch of zoology dealing with the study of birds. Early writings on birds were largely anecdotal (including folklore) or practical (e.g., treatises on falconry and game-bird management). From the mid-18th century on, ornithology progressed from the description and classification to the examination of internal anatomy to the study of bird ecology and ethology. It is one of the few scientific fields in which nonprofessionals make substantial contributions.

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WHO DARES CHANGE A CURRICULUM?

"It's easier to change the location of a cemetery, than the curriculum of a school." - Woodrow Wilson

SCHOOL EDUCATION WILL NOT CHANGE TILL EFFORTS MOVE BEYOND POLICY TO ACTUAL TOOLS THAT ENABLE WHAT AND HOW CHILDREN LEARN. IN THIS TWO-PART END NOTE ASHISH RAJPAL EXAMINES WHAT IS MOST USEFUL TO CHILDREN...

Two weeks ago. I received an invitation to an international seminar being organized by a renowned NGO. Leading educationists would attend the seminar, and consolidate the discourse on cognition, learning and constructivism. It would, assured the invitation, help bring current relevant issues to the fore.

Two years ago. NCERT released the National Curricular Framework 2005. It was the culmination of a year of work led by a 35 member steering committee, which included 21 national Focus groups, 5 regional seminars, and several conferences.

Two decades ago. The Rajiv Gandhi government unveiled the acclaimed New Policy on Education for a new India, which advocated great education reforms.

Good intentions. Great efforts. Yet, classrooms remain the same.

While talking about any change in schools, I realize it is imperative to qualify what change one is talking about. People I meet are not really convinced about why there must be change in the first place. "What's wrong with us?", they say, 'we went through the same classrooms!'

The fact that one is unable to see anything worth improving within oneself may only be part of the problem. Nonetheless, even if you did go to a terrific school, I suspect that you will agree that it was mostly because of what happened outside the classroom. A little introspection, and it is obvious that the

time young children spend inside classrooms could be a lot more useful, a lot less tiresome. I would like to share two common sense action-ideas that experience backs, and research validates - even the National Curriculum Framework is built around pretty much the same principles. The first pertains to what is taught, and the latter to how it is taught.

1. Making the content of classroom instruction useful to real life
2. Shifting away from rote, to methods that make learning a likeable habit

Together, these what and how comprise curriculum. In this part we will deal with the first i.e. the what.

If someone came back to life from the time of Emperor Ashok, they would find the world unrecognizably changed - cities, travel, communication, social mores, you name it. Two places, though, would look much the same: jails, and schools. Without anyone meaning to do so, schools have become places to 'keep' young people - away from trouble, and in suspension till they become 'full' people.

APJ Abdul Kalam noted in a speech to teachers that from Grades 1-12, students spend 25,000 hours on the school campus. Most of us can't count on the fingers of one hand, things we learnt there that were useful in our day to day lives.

The other day, I asked a government school primary teacher what the biggest change in his school was

since he started teaching. The answer was instantaneous: "We started teaching English from Grade 1, earlier it used start much later. That is a good sign."

If you are 18 and can't speak English and don't use the internet, you are seriously disadvantaged. The case for English in real-life has its share of detractors, though. The other big revolution, the Electronic one that revolves around computers, internet, telecom, is not disputed.

Classrooms must equip children to face two other pressing challenges of the coming century: Ecology and Equity. Al Gore's 'An Inconvenient Truth' is the must-watch film for 2007. The crisis of global warming is laid out threadbare. Those who remain oblivious or apathetic to it are the new gun owners and tobacco consumers of the world.

Finally, children today must deal with the social challenge of equity, or the lack of it rather. The UN reports that 2% of the world's adults own 50% of the world's wealth. Disease, ecological devastation, terror are symptoms trace its roots to this cause. Social equity isn't "nice to have" any more, it's a desperate "need to have" - even for the have's. Survival depends on it.

Creating classrooms that can deliver a reasonable education in English, E-technology, Ecology & Equity is not difficult...it's *very* difficult. Policy helps; but only a little. Parents and school leaders need to take charge. And today is a good day to start. ■